

## President's Report to SLAS AGM, 31 March 2023

Thank you for coming along to this AGM and thank you for reading this report if you're catching up afterwards. We really appreciate your taking the time to engage with the running of the Society. The AGM is an important opportunity for the Society's officers and the *BLAR* editors to provide an account of our activities over the last twelve months, as well as for you to ask any questions in relation to those activities.

We are gathered here at Queen's University Belfast for our first ever SLAS conference on the island of Ireland, our first SLAS conference that is held back-to-back in the same location as the PiLAS conference (more on this later), and our second "post-Covid" hybrid conference. As with our conference at the University of Bath last year, we are continuing to build on what we learnt during the pandemic about how to facilitate access for people who can't travel for one reason or another, while preserving the crucial socialising and networking functions that face-to-face conferences have to offer for our members. To that end we have a set of fully online panels on Friday afternoon with fully face-to-face panels taking place throughout the two days. There are, by my count, 69 panels and other formats of roundtable, workshop, film screening, and so on, covering all the different disciplines in our field, as well as a keynote by Mexican author Cristina Rivera Garza. I'm delighted to see so many SLAS and PiLAS members here and I would like to take this opportunity to heartily thank the organising committee – Sarah Bowskill, Tori Holmes and Ricki O'Rawe – on behalf of us all.

Thinking back to this time last year, I think it's fair to say that the 2022 conference in Bath was a huge success. It was our first opportunity to hold a conference with a face-to-face element since 2019 at the University of Leicester and it was clear how much people appreciated that. Nonetheless, virtual attendance was also facilitated through the Gather platform for all formal panels, and even for the AGM, allowing a much wider demographic to participate in the event! The choice of venue for a drinks reception – the Roman Baths – was wonderfully atmospheric and it's a memory I will cherish from my time on the SLAS committee. I would like to take this opportunity to once again thank the Bath team – Juan Pablo Ferrero, Penny Miles and Mariana Lucía Villegas Monroy – for all their hard work in running the conference.

Looking to the future, our next conference in 2024 will be hosted by Barbara Hogenboom and her team at the University of Amsterdam's Centre for Latin American Research and Documentation (CEDLA). We are delighted that they are willing to return to their plans to host a SLAS conference after the 2020 conference was shifted online at short notice because of the pandemic. We know that the 2020 conference was boding to be a very popular event indeed and hope that the 2024 version will be just as popular. Nonetheless, in line with our Climate Action Plan and our pledge to reduce our carbon footprint wherever possible, there will no doubt be a virtual form of participation, as well as other climate-friendly aspects to the face-to-face event. I'd like to personally thank Barbara and team in advance for hosting us. I hope the event also helps to encourage even more networking and collaboration with EU-based colleagues than already exists! And beyond that, we are very open to suggestions

from colleagues who would like to host future SLAS conferences – please just drop Eamon McCarthy, our tireless Secretary for just one more year, an email to put yourself forward.

Behind the scenes, the SLAS committee has had another busy year. Besides other initiatives that I will mention elsewhere in this report, I want to take this opportunity to flag up a range of activities that SLAS committee members have undertaken during the last twelve months. Eve Hayes de Kalaf took the lead on conducting a survey of our membership's needs and desires. We received 86 responses and some really helpful feedback about what members want and need from SLAS that has fed into our deliberations on a wide range of matters. Not least, the value that our membership places on the networking that face-to-face events facilitate has caused us to revisit the SLAS Climate Action Plan, the drafting of which has been led by Paul Merchant. While it is still our intention to reduce the carbon footprint of academic travel, we realise that only holding a face-to-face conference every other year does not serve the best interests of our community, and so we have looked to be more flexible about the way we seek to reduce travel across all SLAS activities, including experimenting with running the SLAS and PiLAS conferences concurrently. Paul Merchant was also successful in applying to UKRI for an AHRC-SNSF award on behalf of SLAS to foster PGR and ECR links between the UK and Switzerland on the subject of 'The Languages of Sustainability in Latin America'. We've had a good response to the scheme and will be holding events in Bern and Zürich later in the year. Karol Valderrama-Burgos and Pete Watson have contributed to the development of a new area on our website devoted to ECR resources; something that we hope to develop further in the coming year. Catriona McAllister and Becky Ogden have been particularly supportive on the grant assessment front, working closely with Eamon McCarthy in his role as Secretary. We also now have two PGRs – Javier Pérez Osorio and Carole Concha Bell – who are tweeting on behalf of SLAS and BLAR – all via the @SLASLatAm account. They've been doing this since the beginning of February and we're delighted with the work that they've done so far. We currently have 10,500 followers.

The Treasurer's report provides all the details of our finances for the past year, so I won't delve into those matters here. Suffice it to say that, despite substantial turbulence in terms of revenues from *BLAR*, SLAS still remains in a very strong financial position. Indeed, this last year we have even been able to launch a new grant scheme – the UK Scholar Research Support grant (3 x £3,000) – to try to address gaps in the funding landscape for our members. Handing out grants and seeing all the fabulous things that people do with the money via the reports that you submit to the SLAS blog is one of the best things about running the Society! We hope to run the new scheme again next year, alongside all our other standard schemes, and encourage SLAS members to consider applying. The success rates for our grants are generally much better than for schemes offered by other funding bodies! Clear-sighted planning for future declines in revenue has been key in seeing us through these turbulent times, and I would like to heartily thank our Treasurer, Jannine Poletti-Hughes for the 'sterling' work she has done to ensure that SLAS continues to thrive. We are also currently considering how best we support the delivery of the Treasurer's role so that it can focus more on strategy and less on the day-to-day payment of bills, thus ensuring that we attract the best people to the role going forward. We also put in place transitional arrangements towards the

end of any given Treasurer's term in office through a substantial period of work-shadowing and we will begin to put such an arrangement in place over the next year so that Jannine can step down formally when her term of office expires in March 2024.

This brings me to *BLAR* itself. While you will also hear more from the perspective of the editorial team in the Coordinating Editor's report, the most significant matter to report is that we have, after long deliberations given the radical changes that are ongoing in the scholarly publishing landscape, signed a new five-year contract with Wiley as the best way to ensure the financial stability of SLAS going forward. We have also had a few changes of personnel in our editorial team over the past year. Juan Pablo Ferrero has stepped up to work alongside Ann Varley as Coordinating Editor over the past six months as the team has transitioned to full use of the Scholar One manuscript management platform. Juan will now take over as the *BLAR* Coordinating Editor – thank you, Juan, for taking on this important role! – and I'd also like to thank Ann for all her work over the years – she's been involved with the journal for two decades, first on the Editorial Board, then as Editor and most recently as Coordinating Editor, and was also on the SLAS committee in the late 1980s and 90s – and wish her the best for her impending retirement. Two new editors have joined the team in the last twelve months – Francisco Eissa-Barroso and Ana Cristina Suzina – and this is my opportunity to welcome them formally to *BLAR* and to SLAS as a whole. I would also like to take this opportunity to extend my sincere thanks to the other stoic editorial team members – Ainhoa Montoya, Penny Miles and Ed King –, and to the *BLAR* editorial assistant, Ken Lestrangle, for their continuing hard work in editing the *Bulletin* for us, particularly in a context of such significant change to publishing and related working practices, and Sarah Ritchie, Associate Journals Publishing Manager at Wiley, for her patience and support through this 'transitional' period. Finally, I would just like to underscore the fact that over 90% of SLAS income comes from *BLAR* and this is what allows us to offer grant funding to as many members as we can. Publishing in *BLAR* is what drives that revenue and this is the Society's journal; it's your journal as members of the Society. Please do consider publishing in it so that we can carry on awarding grants!

PiLAS, the Postgraduate branch of SLAS, has continued to thrive over the past academic year, with Nathan Huanacune (Cambridge) as President and Treasurer and an organising committee based at the Universities of Bristol, Edinburgh, Oxford, Queen's University Belfast, and Surrey. The committee have organised a series of workshops and work-in-progress sessions, as well as an annual conference dedicated to the theme of "Coloniality, Autonomy, and Emancipation in Latin America" that has been timetabled to run on the day before the SLAS conference, here in Belfast. I know that this represents quite a change in practice for the PiLAS committee, but the logic here relates both to reducing our carbon footprint by not encouraging PGRs to travel to two different conferences in the same year, as well as to facilitating PGR attendance at both events and thus offering the potential for greater engagement between PGRs and colleagues more advanced in their careers. We will review this set-up in the coming weeks to see how well it has worked and revise accordingly to facilitate optimal support for our PGR community going forward. As a reminder, the PiLAS committee refreshes annually, so if you're interested in being part of the 2023-24

committee, please talk to the current committee members to get a sense of what it's like and assemble your team.

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, the Arts and Humanities Alliance and the Alliance of Modern Languages, Area Studies and Linguistics Subject Associations UK and I have written letters on behalf of the Society to support fellow Latin Americanists whose working conditions and jobs have been under threat. I have, furthermore, committed to being on the Advisory Group developing the new QAA Subject Benchmark Statement for Area Studies which should be published this time next year, and, as my time as SLAS President draws to a close, I have chosen to take on a role as Co-Chair of the Arts and Humanities Alliance.

I trust that this report clearly demonstrates how SLAS has continued to work to support our field in the UK. I want to pay tribute to all my colleagues on the committee, whose commitment over the last year has ensured the smooth running of the Society. While I have mentioned many of them by name already for their various different contributions, I would particularly like to reiterate my gratitude to the SLAS officers – Jannine Poletti-Hughes as Treasurer, Marieke Riethof as Vice-President, and Eamon McCarthy as Secretary – for their unstinting support. It's been a huge pleasure to work with them. Patience Schell is leaving the committee as Past-President after nearly a decade in various different roles, including Conference Secretary for the Aberdeen conference, ordinary committee member, Vice President, President and, most recently Past-President and Chair of the Standing Conference of Latin American Studies. I would like to thank her for all her hard work over that period – in particular she steered SLAS through the pandemic which was no mean feat. Eve Hayes de Kalaf is also stepping down as committee member after four years and I'd also like to thank her for her hard work, in particular in relation to the member survey. Becky Ogden and Paul Merchant have had their terms renewed for a further two years and we are delighted that they'll be staying on the committee. We will shortly be joined by Cara Levey who is rejoining the committee as an ordinary member and Sarah Bowskill who is also rejoining as Vice-President, and we look forward to working with them both. And finally, I would also like to extend my thanks to Christy Palmer who is retiring as SLAS webmaster and our main 'Tweeter' – she did a fabulous job of overhauling the SLAS website a few years ago and she has kept us ticking over on the technological front in various different guises over a great many years.

Thank you all for coming along to the AGM and/or reading this report. I hope those of you at the conference here in Queen's University Belfast have a wonderful and productive couple of days, and that everyone present, in person or virtually, returns to their 'day jobs' restored and inspired.

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