

# Report of the President of the Society for the Advancement of Scandinavian Study

At Castillo San Cristóbal in Old San Juan, the postcolonial entanglements that were the theme of the 2022 Society for the Advancement of Scandinavian Study (SASS) conference were evident. During the conference visit to Old San Juan, we ran into a group of sailors in their crisp whites. The sailors were cadets at the Spanish Naval Academy who had sailed to San Juan aboard the ship *Juan Sebastián de Elcano*, a tall ship in the Spanish navy, and one of the largest tall ships in the world. The ship's namesake was the captain of Ferdinand Magellan's last colonial Spanish fleet and reputedly the first sailor to circumnavigate the globe. The old Spanish citadel received a new generation of Spanish sailors, with the next stops on their itinerary Havana and Miami. Talking to the sailors reminded me at least of the long and complicated history of Castillo San Cristóbal, Puerto Rico, the Caribbean, and the transatlantic ties that are also part of SASS, and were part of our postcolonial-entanglement theme during the conference.

The entanglements took on another layer in the courtyard of San Cristóbal. Now the naval whites were gone, replaced by people walking around the space of the citadel in gowns and chaperons, breeches and capes, some with scabbards at their sides. FOX was filming the second season of *Fantasy Island* in the St. Cristobal fortress, it turned out.

Later that evening, we moved on to the opening night exhibition of La Vaughn Belle's and Jeanette Ehlers's artwork at Gallery: Pública in the Santurce neighborhood of San Juan. The images of La Vaughn Belle's and Jeanette Ehlers's exhibition stood in contrast to FOX's fantastical images of an hour before.

In such a twist of contrasts and entanglements, it should come as no surprise that the 2022 annual conference at Wyndham Grand Rio Mar in Puerto Rico was stimulating, indeed, an unforgettable conference. The program featured plenary presentations by artists La Vaughn Belle and Jeannette Ehlers and a plenary lecture by Professors Nahir Otaño Gracia and Marian Polhill, as well as a plenary discussion with author Tiphonie Yanique, moderated by Liina-Ly Roos. These presentations and discussions wove together history and memory, image and story, visual art and literature. Speakers returned frequently to the archive of history and culture of the islands of St. Croix and St. Barthélemy, respectively, former Danish and Swedish colonies. They prodded SASS members to think and rethink the objects, periods, geographical concepts, and identities that organize Scandinavian Studies and adjacent disciplines. In a post-conference journey, co-organized with Crucian Heritage and Nature Tourism (CHANT), SASS members traveled on, visiting Christiansted and Frederiksted, including a visit to La Vaughn Belle's studio.

The 2022 conference engendered new questions and made evident persisting erasures in our field. Conference presenters bolstered the discussion with many papers developing our understanding of postcolonial Nordic connections. The rich intellectual rewards of the conference made it substantive and special. The organizing committee of Ursula Lindqvist, Lill-Ann Körber, Melissa Gjellstad, and Julie Allen put together a superb conference. Let me once again express my gratitude on behalf of the society to all who made the successful meeting happen and to all who attended. After our virtual conference in 2021, and our canceled meeting in 2020, I was energized to meet new colleagues and reconnect with familiar ones in person.

Intellectual vibrancy is the source of a learned society's vitality. Yet to sustain the intellectual work, we need to do the society's business well. We must ensure that we are able to continuously shore up and build upon our strong foundation.

The most important contribution to our future during the last year was the Executive Council's decision to hire a full-time Executive Director, Dr. Kimberly La Palm. What did the Executive Director contribute during the last year? For many years, SASS has not passed a budget. Executive Director La Palm created a budget, which was passed by the council. This process significantly increased our financial control. The budget also helped us continue to maintain and adjust our investments and endowments. Our assets increased by \$175,000 for 2021–2022. However, with recent market declines, this increase has shrunk. Nevertheless, careful budgeting helped us control our costs and make our annual conference

revenue neutral, avoiding the significant financial loss that had been projected for the conference due to a decrease in attendance caused by the pandemic, as well as unique costs associated with doing business in Puerto Rico. Importantly, the Executive Director also solicited proposals for a new journal contract, receiving several, which will help ensure SASS can negotiate a well-suited new contract for *Scandinavian Studies*, intended to begin in 2024. This request for proposal (RFP) is the first time the society has sought a competitive proposal for our journal contract—though it is best practice in scholarly publishing. In addition, the Executive Director worked to identify gifts to the Centennial Fund and restart that fund, which had not been tracked since 2016. The Executive Director also collaborated with Vice President Scott Mellor, Executive Council member Marcus Cederström, and others to reform the constitution and put in place several new SASS policies and procedures. The Executive Director also brought back regular publication of *News and Notes*, enhancing SASS communication with its members. Finally, the Executive Director updated our endowment agreements with donors, which led to an opportunity to launch a new grant in Autumn 2022 funded by the Birgit Baldwin endowment. The new grant will provide language-study support to students from historically underrepresented groups in the society. To this list of contributions by Executive Director Kimberly La Palm, many others could be added. Increasing the Executive Director's appointment level was a necessary and strategic change for 2021–2022. But running our business well also carries some costs.

In reviewing SASS's business for 2021–2022, I first want to thank all members who gave to SASS. The Society for the Advancement of Scandinavian Study received more than \$6,000 in gifts from members, and a single gift, which brought total gifts to approximately \$12,000. Since 2005, gifts from members have typically totaled less than \$1,000 annually. In many years, only a few of our hundreds of members have given to support SASS.

The SASS “endowment,” our Reinvestment for Growth account, is worth approximately \$550,000, as I write. How do you think that amount compares to the endowments of other learned societies? Is this account evidence that SASS members have built a strong foundation for the future? Unfortunately, the answer at this time is that we indeed have room for growth. As an example, our peer society, the Association for the Advancement of Baltic Studies (AABS), has an endowment of more than \$4 million. The AABS has built their endowment not only through member giving, but also through planned giving and bequests by members of the society. For SASS to thrive in the future, our society needs to build

a much larger endowment. President Jason Lavery began this effort in 2010 with the Centennial Fund. We need to continue to give to SASS, as Jason asked us to do. My goal for 2022–2023 is for every member of SASS to make at least one donation, no matter the size. There is no barrier to us all giving something. So let us start by all being generous together in an effort to build SASS's common future.

There is another area where SASS members will need to consider doing more. That is in the dollars we pay for memberships. Our Executive Director reviewed our membership during Summer 2022. She found that the price of our institutional subscriptions, of which we carry approximately 100, is approximately a quarter of the price of journals published by our American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS) peers. Another place for improvement is in our membership revenue. I reviewed all of our membership revenue since 2005. It has been flat. In 2005, membership accounted for \$33,278 in SASS revenue. In 2020, membership revenue accounted for \$29,985. To be sure, membership revenue varies with the number of members SASS carries, and we have seen a decline in the number of SASS members in recent years. Yet ensuring our financial stability and ability to do the society's business requires charging for membership at a level that reflects the costs of doing SASS business; members of a nonprofit organization need to contribute to the costs of doing the organization's business. Today, SASS membership costs \$65 (electronic journal) or \$75 (print). The Society for the Advancement of Scandinavian Study needs to increase its membership costs fairly and equitably in line with its peer societies, many of which charge a great deal more than SASS. For example, annual membership in the Modern Language Association (MLA) is prorated by income, with membership cost steps ranging from \$29 for graduate students to \$387 for top-bracket salaries. Many other peer societies offer annual membership prorated by income, with step costs ranging from \$50 to \$250. Some of our members are lifetime members, such as myself. I paid \$500 for my lifetime membership in 2003 and have not paid a cent in membership fees since. I know I can do better than that, for example, if there were a voluntary "sustaining member" contribution available to me as a lifetime member. It is time for SASS to update its membership rates and cost structure to reflect the costs of operating our society, as well as to bring us into parity with our ACLS peers. Such changes will help ensure that we can do the business of the society well and continue to deliver the excellent conference and journal that our members value.

Reuniting in 2022 at the SASS annual conference in San Juan, Puerto Rico, provided an inspiring boost of intellectual energy, with the excellent program, visits to San Juan, the intellectual and emotional encounter with

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Caribbean postcolonial entanglements, and the ideas and conversations that the conference inspired. Our annual conference in Austin, Texas, will sustain that energy. As you look forward to meeting again in Austin during the year ahead, would you please give to SASS? Continue to give your ideas. But also invest in our society. SASS needs all of us to continue to build the society together.

Andrew Nestingen  
*SASS President*