

PRESIDENT'S REPORT  
AMERICAN INSTITUTE FOR SRI LANKAN STUDIES  
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As I look back at all of the activities of AISLS the past year, I am very mindful of how the work of AISLS as a scholarly organization depends on the generosity, imagination, initiative, and energy of many people and thus, this year as in past years, I would like to begin this year's president's report with an acknowledgement and expression of gratitude to them.

Above all, I would like to thank John Rogers for his work as AISLS' US Director and Ira Unamboowe or her work as AISLS' Overseas Director and as Executive Director of our Colombo center. Their initiative, their sense of responsibility, and their efforts enable the work of AISLS to proceed effectively and smoothly. It is not too much to say that John Rogers and Ira Unamboowe are the *sine qua non* of AISLS.

The staff of our Colombo Center, Deepthi Gunaratne, M. de S. Weerasuriya, and Lorette Weeraratne have continued to work effectively to ensure the excellent functioning of our Center, and they have also continued to work creatively to make our services as accessible as possible in Sri Lanka. In the United States, Don Keller (administrative support) and Selma Omerefendic (accounting) continued in essential roles that allow AISLS to function smoothly and to meet its organizational responsibilities. The work of all of these people may not be immediately visible to the members of AISLS, but everything that we do depends on their efforts.

The work of AISLS depends on its listserve in many key ways, and I would like to thank Michele Gamburd for her steady hand as our listserve director for the past years.

I am also grateful to Jeanne Marecek for continuing to help to provide oversight for the Colombo Center and for her willingness to provide counsel on many issues that have come up the past year.

AISLS continues to receive its core funding from the US Department of Education and from the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA), US Department of State. The ECA funds are a subgrant from the Council of American Overseas Research Centers (CAORC). Mary Ellen Lane, Heidi Massaro, Robin Presta, Monica Clark and the other CAORC staff have continued to give AISLS important support. I would like to thank these institutions and individuals for their support of AISLS.

In addition to myself as president, the AISLS executive committee over the past year was comprised of Jonathan Spencer (vice president), Jeffrey Samuels (secretary), Caitrin Lynch (treasurer), Jeanne Marecek (past president) and Dennis McGilvray (member at

large). I would like to thank all executive committee members for volunteering their service.

Caitrin Lynch's term as treasurer comes to a conclusion in October 2010 and I would like to thank her especially for her six years of work on behalf of AISLS in this role. Caitrin served as treasurer during a period when AISLS went through a ambitious period of growth and Caitrin always took up the increased demands that this made on her with grace.

Finally I would also like to thank all of the members of the Board of Directors, both elected representatives and institutional representatives for volunteering their service to AISLS. The terms of Darshan Ambalavanar and John Holt, two of the elected members of the AISLS Board of Directors, end this year and I especially thank them for what they have offered to AISLS these past years as members of the Board.

## **Elections**

AISLS is currently in the course of holding elections for President, Vice-President, Treasurer, and for two elected Board of Directors positions. The results will be announced at our Annual General Meeting on October 16, 2010. Jonathan Spencer and myself are standing for re-election as Vice-President and President respectively and Daniel Bass is standing for election as Treasurer. The candidates for the Board positions are Bambi Chapin, Michele Gamburd, John Holt, Daniel Kent and Sharika Thiranagama

## **Awards and Grants**

AISLS continued its established fellowship competition for scholars who already have the Ph.D. or equivalent by the beginning of their fellowship tenure. Fellowships can range between two and nine months. Because of restrictions set by our funder, the US State Department, only US citizens are eligible. This year fellowships were granted to Christina Davis (Anthropology, University of Michigan), Susanne Mrozik (Religious Studies, Mt. Holyoke College), and Ronit Ricci (Comparative Literature, Australian National University).

AISLS continued its relatively new dissertation planning grants program, designed to enable graduate students to spend six to eight weeks in Sri Lanka to improve their dissertation proposals. Awardees were Bernardo Brown (Anthropology, Cornell University) and Victor Nemchenok (History, University of Virginia).

Two awards were made during the year under the AISLS program to support language instruction in Sri Lanka. New procedures to identify language instructors have led to what we think are improvements in this program, and we plan further changes in the coming year in order to better assess the usefulness of these awards for language instruction to awardees.

AISLS continues to offer its graduate student members support to attend selected scholarly conferences in North America through its Travel Stipend Program. Eleven such awards were made in the past year.

AISLS also supported two efforts to preserve and disseminate research materials. The Cornell Language Acquisition Lab is converting unique linguistic data on Sinhala into digital form and expects eventually to make this material available freely on the Internet. The International Centre for Ethnic Studies, in a program directed by Gananath Obysekere, is working to locate, copy, and make available transcripts of early modern palm-leaf manuscripts found in various libraries in Sri Lanka.

### **Workshops and Conferences**

In the past year, AISLS has sponsored a number of conferences and workshops that in a variety of ways have sought to promote international connections in the study of Sri Lanka, including our continuing aim to promote scholarly interaction between American scholars working on Sri Lanka and our colleagues in Sri Lanka; encouraging triangulated relations among American scholars, Sri Lankan scholars and those working in Europe; and promoting greater interaction between scholars working on Sri Lanka and those students and scholars concentrating on other regions of South Asia and also on Southeast Asia.

For the first time, AISLS also sponsored a workshop in the United States designed specifically for graduate students. Entitled “Sri Lanka in South Asia: Future Horizons for Scholarship,” this workshop was held in April, 2010 in New York at the India-China Institute of the New School for Social Research, New York, which also co-funded the workshop. It was a two-day event, with the first day devoted to research panels and the second day consisting of a dissertation development seminar and a round table discussion. About 40 students and scholars from a wide range of disciplines participated. We are hoping to continue to support workshops for graduate students interested in the study of Sri Lanka in the future. I want to thank Sharika Thiranagama, Samuel Holt, Thusara Hewage, Justin Henry, Kitana Ananda, and Mythri Jegathesan for all that they did in organizing this workshop. I also want to thank Sharika Thiranagama especially for her imagination and effort for not only making this first graduate workshop happen, but for making it a success.

In October 2009, AISLS sponsored a one-day conference on “‘Early Modernity’ in Sri Lanka, South Asia, and Southeast Asia.” This event was a preconference to the Annual Conference on South Asia in Madison. Six specialists on Sri Lanka, including four scholars from Europe, provided pre-circulated papers. Each paper had two discussants, one who worked on mainland South Asia, and one who worked on Southeast Asia. One purpose of the preconference was to show how exchange among specialists in the study of South Asia and Southeast Asia can suggest new possibilities for the investigation and interpretation of Sri Lanka and South Asia. Around 25 scholars participated. This event

was organized by John Rogers and it is connected to the special AISLS initiative on historiography that began John Rogers' "brainchild" from its beginnings in January 2009.

In August 2010, the AISLS center in Colombo (or more strictly, our legal entity in Sri Lanka, the American Institute for Lankan Studies, or AILS) sponsored a two-day workshop on "Historical Methods", again convened by John Rogers and connected to the historiography initiative. Twenty-five scholars participated, including seven based in the US and four from third countries. Sri Lankan participants came from the Universities of Colombo, Peradeniya, Ruhuna, Kelaniya, and Jaffna. This event was a direct follow-up to the workshop on historiography held in Colombo in September 2009, and sought to further the general AISLS goal of promoting the internationalization of scholarship on and in Sri Lanka. Three of our fellowship holders (Ronit Ricci, an AISLS Fellowship recipient in 2010, Susanne Mrozik, and AISLS Fellowship recipient in 2010, and Frank Korom, an AISLS Fellowship recipient in 2009) were participants. Jonathan Spencer, AISLS Vice-President, and myself were also present. More historiography initiative events are currently being planned for 2011.

AISLS is, at present, organizing workshops to be held in the coming year. For example, in November, there will be a workshop on Sufism in Sri Lanka that has been organized by Dennis McGilvray and Frank Korom.

It is important for AISLS to continue to receive new ideas for possible workshops and I invite members of AISLS to contact John Rogers or myself with ideas for future workshops that might be convened by AISLS.

In March 2010, AISLS sponsored a forum at the annual meeting of the Association of Asian Studies, which was held in Philadelphia. The roundtable focused on Liyanage Amarakeerthi's presentation, "Cultural Criticism in Contemporary Sri Lanka". About 20 scholars participated. I am grateful to Jeanne Marecek for organizing this event. We are not planning to hold an AISLS event at the 2011 AAS meetings in Hawai'i.

In 2009, AISLS began a new initiative of trying to reach out to younger faculty on staff at various Sri Lankan universities as a way of cultivating new academic connections and exchanges between American scholars of Sri Lanka and their Sri Lankan colleagues and in 2010, we have tried to build on what started informally in 2009. In August 2010, I met with about 25 younger faculty members in the humanities and social sciences at the University of Peradeniya for a wide-ranging discussion on the challenges facing all of us who are engaged in the study of Sri Lanka. In September 2010, AISLS sponsored an afternoon workshop on "Academic Writing" for junior faculty in the humanities at the University of Peradeniya. This event was convened by Susanne Mrozik, and I want to thank her for her generosity in convening this workshop on behalf of AISLS. Future workshops of this sort are currently being planned.

In addition to holding workshops in Sri Lanka and making library resources available to Sri Lankan scholars, we encourage and facilitate visiting American scholars to give

lectures at Sri Lankan universities. This is something that we would like to become more effective at arranging in the future.

Beyond the support it lends through its Travel Stipend program for graduate students, AISLS continues to encourage scholarly participation at various conference settings including the Annual South Asia Conference at Madison, the Tamil Studies Conference in Toronto, and the annual meeting of the Association for Asian Studies. In “unofficial” ways, AISLS also has aided the identification of Sri Lankan scholars to be invited to other academic meetings in the United States.

Information about scholarly conferences relevant to the study of Sri Lanka is also regularly disseminated through our listserv.

### **Colombo Center**

In the past year, the American Institute for Lankan Studies’ (or AILS-- AISLS’ legal entity in Sri Lanka) Colombo Center has served an increasing number of US-based, Sri Lankan, and third-country scholars. All books in the library are catalogued according to the Library of Congress system, and the catalog is now available at <http://catalog.crl.edu/search~S14/X>. The collection includes recent academic books on Sri Lanka published in Europe and the United States, many of which are not available in other libraries in Sri Lanka.

The library also offers access to JSTOR and some other electronic resources. Ira Unamboowe, the Executive Director of AILS, has been especially energetic in outreach regarding our facilities in JSTOR, traveling to different universities in Sri Lanka to provide an introduction to scholarly access that JSTOR affords scholars and students. Her most recent JSTOR workshops, in September 2010, were held over three days at the Eastern University. Earlier in 2010, Ira Unamboowe held workshops at Sri Jayewardenepura University and the Marga Institute.

In August 2010, we signed a new lease for our Center premises for the calendar year 2011. Significant projects of Center maintenance and improvement, including interior painting, were undertaken in the past year.

Through the initiative of Ira Unamboowe and with the assistance of Deepthi Guneratne and Lorette Weeraratne from the Center staff, a pamphlet has been prepared that will draw attention to the resources on “The Decorative Arts of Sri Lanka” that are now available through the Digital Library on Furniture and Decorative Arts of Sri Lanka (see << <http://dlir.aiys.org/LALORC/AISLS/aboutFDASL.htm>>> and << <http://www.localarchives.org/dlir/sri-lanka/>>>). This digital library, one result of an AISLS-sponsored documentary project, displays an inventory of furniture and other decorative arts that were created in Sri Lanka and are currently owned by Sri Lanka's cultural institutions and private collections. It consists of approximately 1,000 images of 400 items, many unique, which were photographed by the project's principal researcher,

Ayesha Abdur-Rahman. We hope that this pamphlet will make the digital library's resources more widely known in Sri Lanka as well as call attention to the fact that there is continuing work being done on the decorative arts of Sri Lanka. I am grateful to Ira Unamboowe, Deepthi Guneratne, and Lorette Weeraratne for all that they did to make this pamphlet appear.

The 2009 issue of the Sri Lanka Journal of the Humanities was shipped from Sri Lanka to the US and distributed to interested AISLS members in 2010.

The center staff continues to be willing to try to meet requests from members for specific publications. These will be supplied on an at-cost basis.

The center staff also continues to offer general advice and support for AISLS members visiting Sri Lanka.

John Rogers, the US Director, Jeanne Marecek, the Past President of AISLS, Jonathan Spencer, the Vice-President of AISLS, and myself all visited the Colombo Center in the past year.

### **Organizational Developments**

Significant changes to the Companies Act in Sri Lanka have led to increased reporting requirements by the Colombo Center. AISLS's procedures are periodically adjusted to ensure that the organization complies with relevant legislation and regulations from the Government of Sri Lanka.

We welcomed the North Carolina Consortium for South Asian Studies, the New School for Social Research, and Harvard University to AISLS during the past year as institutional members. This brings the total number of institutional members to nineteen. There are also 93 individual AISLS members.

In addition to the efforts of AISLS officers and staff, institutional members and individual members, the work of AISLS depends on the efforts of other organizations as well. I thus feel it is appropriate to draw your attention to changes that will be occurring at the South Asia Language Resource Center (SALRC; see <<<http://salrc.uchicago.edu/about/>>>), in which AISLS has been a participating institution. AISLS's president has occupied a rotating position on SALRC's executive committee since the latter's inception. The SALRC's Language Resource Center grant from the Department of Education was not renewed this past summer and subsequently the University of Chicago decided that it will not provide a home to the SALRC past the current year. The SALRC will conclude activities at the University of Chicago on August 14, 2011.

There is one major area that may affect Sri Lankan studies in the United States, namely the continuation of SASLI (the South Asia Summer Language Institute, administered by SALRC), where both Tamil and Sinhala have been taught the last summers, and I will

keep you informed of developments as I learn of them on SASLI and any other areas that may impact Sri Lankan studies in the United States.