

**The 5th Cracovian Conference of Latin
Americanists *Violence in Latin America.
Challenges and Perspectives for the Future,*
5–6th of April 2019, Cracow, Poland**

**La V Conferencia Cracoviana Latinoamericanista
La Violencia en América Latina.
Retos y perspectivas para el futuro,
5–6 de abril de 2019, Cracovia, Polonia**

A widely circulated report published by the Igarapé Institute in 2018 highlighted that Latin American countries are home to only 8 percent of the world's population, yet 33 percent of its homicides. Such data explains why for many years Latin America has been considered the most violent region on Earth. With worrying news coming from Venezuela, which for the past few years, parallel to a political and humanitarian crisis, witnessed an appalling rise in homicide rates; citizens of Mexico overwhelmed by an over-decade long War on Drugs, which instead of curtailing violence in the state, increased it; and inhabitants of Rio de Janeiro observing for most of 2018 botched attempts of the military to regain control in the city's favelas, the issue of violence seemed a very valid topic to be discussed during the 5th Cracow Conference of Latin Americanists. At the beginning of April 2019 researchers from Europe and the Americas had the opportunity to meet in Cracow to discuss not only the challenges related to high levels of violence in the region, but also possible means and strategies to overcome it.

The organization of the Cracow Latin Americanists Conferences dates back to 2007 when the first edition was organized by the Institute of American Studies and Polish Diaspora of the Jagiellonian University. Since then every three years researchers have had the opportunity to meet and discuss essential topics related to Latin American society, politics and culture. The first two conferences: *The Experience of Democracy in Latin America*, organized in 2007, and *Social and Ethnic Movements in Latin America*, held in 2010, gathered Polish researchers. Starting from 2013, the conferences broadened its outreach and became international. The 3rd conference, *Human Rights in Latin America*, and the 4th one held in 2016, *Migrations and Diasporas in Contemporary Latin America*, managed to gather participants

from Europe and the Americas, including guests from Austria, France, Spain, Hungary, Cuba, Venezuela, Mexico, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica and the United States. The 5th edition, *Violence in Latin America. Challenges and Perspectives for the Future*, which took place on the 5th and 6th of April, also managed to become a valuable space for the exchange of ideas and lively discussions of researchers from the Czech Republic, Germany, Switzerland, Spain, Portugal, Mexico, Peru, Colombia, Brazil and the United States. For Polish scholars the event became another opportunity – after the 3rd International Latin Americanists Conference in Lublin in November 2018 – to connect with their peers from other countries and promote Polish Latin American studies, research and academic journals.

To emphasize the importance of the event, the Jagiellonian University decided to welcome the participants of the conference in the main hall of its oldest building, the medieval Collegium Maius, a silent witness of the university's over 650-year-old history. The guests were welcomed by the authorities of the Jagiellonian University and academic teachers at the Institute of American Studies and Polish Diaspora: chairman of the Department of Latin America and conference organizer, Professor Karol Derwich, Vice-Dean of the Faculty of International and Political Studies, Professor Paweł Laidler and the Institute's Director, Professor Radosław Rybkowski. Professor Rybkowski during his opening remarks mentioned that among the university's most valuable antiques deposited in a nearby room in Collegium Maius was a 16th century globe, one of the world's oldest preserved globes showing the American continent.

After the opening speeches, Professor Katarzyna Krzywicka from the Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin and doctor Paulina Napierała from the Jagiellonian University had the opportunity to present two academic journals: *Anuario Latinoamericano – Ciencias Políticas y Relaciones Internacionales* focused on disseminating the findings of research focused on political studies and IR, and *Ad Americam. Journal of American Studies* publishing articles on both North and Latin American politics, law, culture and comparative studies. Professor Krzywicka, as the editor-in-chief, and doctor Napierała, as the managing editor, encouraged the event's participants to submit their papers. The opening lecture entitled *Anthropological Observations on the Culture of Violence and Transgression in Latin America* was delivered by Professor Ángel-Baldomero Espina Barrio from the University of Salamanca. The keynote speaker's interesting and thought-provoking remarks regarding the sources and types of violence, as well as the culture of violence in the distant region, constituted a good opening point for debates and raised multiple questions and comments from the audience after the lecture.

The conference sessions started in the afternoon, after the opening ceremony. Due to the high number of participants, two to three sessions were held simultaneously, which gave the speakers enough time to present the fin-

dings of their research and the audience to raise questions. Sessions held on the first day of the conference were dedicated to the history and remembrance of violence, its victims and public policies to combat it. The papers, presented in Spanish and English, focused among others on the Brazilian prison system, criminological studies on the victims of violence in Paraguay, the naturalization of the culture of violence in Mexico, protests and repression in Central America and the police forces in Peru. Sessions on the second day of the conference were dedicated to migrations, violence against indigenous communities, violence in legal perspective, the political aspect of violence, violence in literature and visual arts, as well as economic and social problems related to violence. Among the analyzed topics were the nexus between migration, security and violence in the 21st century in the US, Mexico and Central America, the issue of violence at the borders, the relation between violence and sovereignty, violence against women (the case of forced sterilizations in Peru, cultural means to overcome it), the reform of the penal code in Mexico, the pacification program in the favelas of Rio de Janeiro or the esthetics of the *narconovela*. Positive feedback coming from the audience was expressed by numerous questions directed to the speakers, which enabled constructive debates.

The final part of the conference was the closing lecture *Arms trafficking in Latin America: A Challenge for the Most Violent Region in the World*, delivered by doctor Carlos Pérez Ricart from the University of Oxford. The keynote speaker raised the issue of legal arms trade, how arms from legal authorized sources and channels reach unauthorized actors, as well as the impact easy access to arms has on the levels of crime and homicide rates. After a spirited discussion, which allowed to capture and summarize some of the main challenges and opportunities regarding decreasing violence in Latin America, Professor Derwich took the opportunity to thank the conference participants for their interest in the event and valuable contributions, and expressed the expectation that the Cracow Latin Americanists Conferences will continue to serve as a platform connecting scholars from all over the world and become a starting point for cooperation and joint research programs.

The conferences also allow to disseminate the research results of their participants. A joint international publication is planned by the organizers, conference attendees are also encouraged to send their papers to *Anuario Latinoamericano – Ciencias Políticas y Relaciones Internacionales* and *Ad Americam*. The Institute of American Studies and Polish Diaspora is aware not only of the conference's output of networking researchers from different research centers and encouraging future cooperation as was the case so far, but also of the didactic value of the conference. The Cracow Latin Americanists Conferences are attended by an increasing number of Polish students, including PhD candidates, who have the unique opportunity to participate in an international event dedicated to Latin America, listen to experts in their areas from

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European and American research centers and thus enrich their knowledge about this fascinating region. These factors make the conference organizers look forward to hosting the next, 6th edition of the Cracow Latin Americanists Conference, this time however, in 2021, as from now on the event is to be held every two years.

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