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**Review: Congreso de la Asociación de Historiadores Latinoamericanistas Europeos, Universitat de València, September 2017**

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**Congreso de la Asociación de Historiadores  
Latinoamericanistas Europeos  
Universitat de València, September 2017**

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**REVIEWED BY PHILIPP KANDLER**

*Philipp Kandler completed his B.A. in History and his M.A. in Global History at the Freie Universität Berlin. He is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in History and Latin American Studies at the Freie Universität with the International Research Training Group “Between Spaces,” working on the reactions of the Chilean and Argentine dictatorships to human rights criticisms of the 1970s and 80s.*

The Association of European Historians of Latin America (AHILA) held its 18<sup>th</sup> congress in the city of Valencia, Spain from the 5<sup>th</sup> to the 9<sup>th</sup> of September, 2017. The topic of discussion was “On the Margins of Traditional History: New Perspectives of Latin America from the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.” Academics, mostly from European and Latin American universities, discussed topics from Latin American history as varied as “Times of Change: Governments and Social Transformation in Latin America During the Cold War (1945-1975),” “The Atlantic as Political Space (1780-1840)” and “Transatlantic Political Networks Between Europe and Latin America (1959-1979)” across 64 panels. These panels were organized along a wide range of specific approaches, actors, source types, time frames and sub-regions, ranging from colonial to contemporary times. Although this made for a diverse offer of interesting presentations, the participants had to limit themselves to only a few of them due to the restricted time frame of effectively one full and two half days of actual panels. Attending the panels also meant not being able to take advantage of the cultural program that the organizers had prepared. This included guided tours by professors of the University of Valencia through the historic city centre or museums.

The congress was inaugurated by keynote speaker Prof. Jaime Rodríguez of the University of California, Irvine, in the hall of the Monastery of San Miguel de los Reyes. Unfortunately, Prof. Rodríguez’s presentation limited itself to merely reviewing Spanish American independence and seemed targeted towards an audience of the general public rather than scholars specializing in Latin American history.

Concluding remarks were given by Prof. Ana Ribeiro of the Universidad Católica del Uruguay and addressed three historical events that connected the Río Plata-Basin, which is often seen as a marginal space in historiography, to global events. The first instance was the time of the first arrival of European colonists and *conquistadores* when the wide plains of South America were converted into a synonym of ‘vast- and emptiness’ in European discourse. The second was the time

of independence, when Latin Americans renegotiated their place in the (Atlantic) world. Thirdly, Prof. Ribeiro brought her audience up to the present day, castigating what she sees as the decisive characteristic of this era—that is, the tendency of Latin American scholars of trying to apply European models to their work, and ends with a call to arms to develop their own models. According to Prof. Ribeiro, the concept of ‘global history’ might prove to be either a reinforcement of European models or an opportunity to diversify historical research by including models based on different local experiences. Prof. Ribeiro’s speech profited from her emphatic narrative style, which positively differed from the rather dry enumeration of events and facts of the inaugural speech.

Though the congress was about Latin American history, the individual panels all addressed more specific topics. In the panels I was able to attend, this helped the debates, which were mostly informative and concrete. However, when the panel coordinators allowed questions and comments only after a block of presentations—which was the case in two of the three panels I visited—or even only at the end of the whole panel, this led to a situation where comments and questions were focused on one or two speakers, while others were ignored. A general problem, which is unfortunately typical of bigger congresses, was the absence of a sizeable number of speakers. This made it nearly impossible to switch among panels—something visitors might have wanted to do due to the large number of panels—since the official schedule kept changing when speakers did not show up. The actual number of participants, which was still significant in size, also made it more difficult to get in contact with other scholars and led to an atomization of the congress. As the panels took place in different parts of the university with no central meeting place, this became an issue, especially for young scholars such as myself, who have yet to build up professional networks or recognition. Nevertheless, participation in one of the ‘big’ congresses with a broad range of topics was a valuable experience.

This was my first opportunity to present on such a big stage in front of a number of specialists, not only in Latin American history but specifically in the topic I am working on. Due to the absence of a number of speakers on this panel, the discussion was able to dig deeper into the topic—state publications as a specific source type—and I received valuable comments and recommendations for my future work with these sources.

The AHILA congresses are held every three years, the next one being scheduled for the late summer of 2020 in Paris. It is the largest congress on Latin American history in Europe and due to the variety of topics, students working on Latin American history—be it colonial, post-colonial or contemporary—will certainly find a panel where they could fit in. One potential issue for those interested are the fees, which were €100-150 for the Congress in Valencia for members of AHILA, and €200-250 for non-members, depending on the date of registration.

Ultimately, I enjoyed the congress in Valencia, which was my first time presenting in front of an audience composed of people who I did not know beforehand and also my first time as a participant in a conference of this size. Although I was unfortunately unable to make new contacts and had to spend most of my time with fellow students from Berlin, who might also have been in a similar situation, it nonetheless proved to be a valuable experience. In the response to my presentation, I was offered unique perspectives and valuable comments for my work. Receiving feedback by people who might not work on my exact topic, but are far more familiar with the national histories of the countries I am dealing with, was a crucial addition to the more methodological and conceptual comments I might get from a presentation in Berlin.