Guatemala Genocide

Guest editors: Diane M. Nelson and Elizabeth Oglesby

In Guatemala, it was called the 'trial of the century': the prosecution of former de facto head of state (1982-1983) General José Efraín Ríos Montt on charges of genocide and crimes against humanity in relation to atrocities committed in the Maya-Ixil region. Ríos Montt's seventeen-month reign was one of the bloodiest periods in Guatemala's history, with 'scorched earth' massacres, the destruction of hundreds of Maya communities, massive population displacement in the rural areas, and a program of militarized resettlement of Mayas into 'model villages' (strategic hamlets).

Ríos Montt was convicted on all charges. Ten days later, however, on 20 May 2013, a higher court vacated the verdict on dubious procedural grounds, and the case remains at an impasse. Nevertheless, as the world's first genocide trial held in the ordinary courts of the country in which the crimes were committed, the Guatemala case is precedent setting in many ways. For example, the judges linked systematic sexual violence to a strategy to destroy the Maya-Ixil ethnic group, a judicial precedent in international legal discussions of gendered war crimes.

In this special issue, we are interested in articles that address rigorously the complexities of the Guatemala experience and/or reflect upon the case's implications for understanding and prosecuting the category of genocide more broadly. Specific questions might include: the impact of the genocide trial on indigenous identifications, collective memory, and political subjectivity (such as Maya—and non-indigenous—communities which experienced similar violence but were not part of the case or, as genocide excludes political affiliation, the pressure to perform an identity of neutral victim); the complexities of social reconciliation when Mayas were both victims and perpetrators of mass atrocities (through participation in the army and the army-organized 'civil patrol'); the intersections of gender, sexuality, and ethnicity in genocide; the possibilities for broadening the scope of prosecution beyond the military (to include, perhaps, national elites who colluded with the army, as well as transnational actors). We are also interested in critical thinking on the interconnections of national and transnational processes, extending over almost 30 years, that brought the case to trial, as well as reflections on what might actually connect (rather than simply assuming they do) genocide with justice, 'truth' with 'reconciliation', and trials with 'transitions'.

Please send proposals of approximately 300 words (paying particular attention to the originality or and source for the research) and a short c.v. to dnmelson@duke.edu and eoglesby@email.arizona.edu. The deadline for proposals is 15 December 2013, and for submissions 1 June 2014. The journals peer review policies are set out here: http://www.tandfonline.com/action/authorSubmission?journalCode=cjgr20&page=instructions
All submissions are subjected to the journal’s regular anonymous peer review process. Instructions for authors can be found at: http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/journal.asp?issn=1462-3528&linktype=44