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Introduction

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Over the past ten years, Latin America has made a number of important legal, sociological, political and even artistic contributions to Genocide Studies. Surprisingly and unfortunately, however, these contributions have made little impact outside the region. In the English-speaking world, reports on recent trials for human rights violations in Argentina, Chile, Colombia and Uruguay are uncommon and the academic output of the region is virtually unknown. The one exception has been the much-debated Rios Montt case in Guatemala; but other issues have been more or less ignored.

Consequently, in this special issue we decided to present recent work on genocide by Spanish-speaking authors. Most legal and academic papers on the subject have been published in Argentina. Consequently, we have selected articles and reports from the last two years of the *Revista de Estudios sobre Genocidio* (Journal of Genocide Studies), edited by the National University of Tres de Febrero, being the only journal on genocide studies published in Spanish, and one legal article from the *Revista de Derecho Penal y Criminología* (Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology), edited by Editorial La Ley, both based in Buenos Aires.

The selection begins with an article by an Argentine jurist, Marcelo Ferreira, on the doctrine developed by the Spanish and Argentine courts for defining massive state violence in Argentina and Chile. The term genocide has been increasingly used in judicial sentences since a Spanish judge (Baltasar Garzón) described the events as a “partial destruction of the national group”. Ferreira analyzes the notions of “group” and “national group” since their inclusion in the Genocide Convention as well as their use in the judgments and recommendations of various national and regional courts, including the Inter-American Court of Human Rights. It also highlights how some interpretations of “national group” express a Eurocentric bias on how nations are constituted – a bias that is both discriminatory and foreign to the way Latin American nations are constituted.

Next comes an article by Spanish historian Antonio Míguez Macho, who proposes a reformulation of the repression of the Franco era in Spain as a “genocidal social practice”. Míguez Macho pays special attention to the persecution and destruction of various social, political and professional groups in the north-western region of Galicia, as seen through primary source documents. He claims that the concepts and approaches previously used to understand repression in Franco’s Spain have obscured the role and consequences of systematic state violence. He also argues that the concept of genocidal social practice can help to assess the impact of these practices in contemporary Spain.

This is followed by an article by Lucrecia Molinari, an Argentine PhD Candidate researching massive state violence in El Salvador. Molinari sets out to analyse the run-up to the repression; the last years of the 1960s. Her approach, which is both challenging and thought-provoking, questions the causal model that links the repression to leftist armed violence in the region. Linking the construction of a counterinsurgency state in El Salvador with the broader political struggles of the 1960s, the article proposes a relative autonomy of repressive policies from left-wing violence, suggesting that counterinsurgency policies in El Salvador (as in many Latin American countries) sought to destroy the social fabric even before the armed left was able to intervene effectively. Counterinsurgency operations went far beyond combating guerrillas, which also explains the size of the massacres and their genocidal character as a “destruction of the national group”.

Following this, Argentine sociologist Lior Zylberman examines the ways in which massive state violence in Argentina has been portrayed in cinema. Through a systematic analysis of the main films of the 1980s (including Argentina’s first Oscar winner, *La Historia Oficial*, “The Official Story”), Zylberman focuses on different narrative strategies, questioning those visions that characterize the period as immersed in what later came to be known as “the theory of the two demons” (the equating of state repressive violence with violence by leftist groups). On the contrary, Zylberman finds many narrative threads based on discursive strategies that would emerge more decisively in the mid-1990s.

Finally, it is no minor issue that Latin American courts have included high-level legal discussions in their judgments of the perpetrators. However, they have not been made public outside the region partly because they have not been translated into English, but also partly because they disagree with the hegemonic trends and tendencies of international courts. This is most notably the case in Argentina, but also in Chile, Colombia and Guatemala, with complex and important debates in Uruguay, Brazil, Ecuador and Peru, among other countries.

For this reason, we decided to include a case note with extracts from a recent Argentine judgment. This judgment was handed down by Federal Court No. 1 of La Plata in 2012 and it is neither the first nor the only judgement to recognise that genocide happened in Argentina (two previous judgments of the same court and another six from other Argentine courts have also done so. In 2012 and 2013 there were two convictions for complicity on genocide). However, we found it significant because of the way Latin American courts have begun to characterise events “unequivocally” as genocide, and because it concerns senior officials involved in running a network of concentration camps.

We sincerely hope that that you will find this selection of papers a stimulating contribution to the complex field of genocide studies.

Last, but not least, I would like to thank some IAGS members who made possible the reality and quality of this issue. First of all, and beyond being in charge of every detail of the issue, Rafiki Ubaldo did an amazing work of managing the administrative relation with our partners in the University of South Florida. Without his commitment, neither the whole journal project nor this issue would have been possible. The whole Journal Transition Committee (Chaired by Kjell Anderson and with the participation of Frank Chalk, William Schabas, Melanie O’Brien, Emmanuel Taub and Amy Fagin) was fundamental in the process of transition to our new online free and open access journal. Finally, the assistance of Douglas Irvin-Erickson, Adam Müller, Melanie O’Brien, Hannibal Travis, Ernesto Verdeja, Amy Fagin and Andrew Woolford was fundamental in editing the translation of the articles and documents published in this issue.

Daniel Feierstein - Guest Editor