SUMMARY

This proposal seeks funding to support the creation of a symposium on the social, historical, and cultural problem of paramilitarism in its diverse forms. This two-day symposium, to be held at the University of Arizona in April 2015, will bring together premier scholars examining aspects of paramilitarism from such diverse fields as Anthropology, Cultural Studies, History, Law, Literary Studies, Political Science, and Sociology and whose institutional affiliations (both academic and non-governmental) and research are located in Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Guatemala, Mexico, and the United States. The aim of the symposium is to facilitate an interdisciplinary, transregional dialogue that will strengthen the pioneering volume of original essays, Men with Guns: Cultures of Paramilitarism and the Modern Americas, to which all symposium participants are contributors. A face-to-face meeting of our contributors in a focused setting that facilitates debate will not only increase the project’s visibility by opening its questions to the public, but also greatly enhance the publication’s ability to present a cohesive examination of these issues, resulting in a sustained trans-regional and interdisciplinary collaboration among the participants. With contributions already in advanced stages of development, we expect the results of this meeting—the published, collaborative research called Men with Guns—to be in circulation by the spring of 2016.

RATIONALE

From Ferguson to Michoacán to Rio de Janeiro, scholars, journalists, and the public at large are talking and writing about the prevalence of forms of paramilitarization such as the expansion of paramilitary police, the increasing role of military contractors in zones of conflict, the privatization of the security state, and the militarization of civilians as organized autodefensas. Despite the widespread invocation of the term “paramilitary,” however, the contours of this concept remain imprecise, signaling a broad zone of indistinction between formal militaries and their para (beside, on behalf of, in lieu of) military counterparts. In the most traditional sense, paramilitarism refers to non-state actors that take up arms in the interest of local security. But paramilitarism also describes the militarization of formal state security institutions, such as the erstwhile civilian police (Doty 2009, Robinson 2010, Goldstein 2010, Graham 2011). And in yet another iteration of the term, paramilitarism addresses the way in which the state lets its violence to other entities, either explicitly through private contractors (Singer 2003, Scahill 2007) or implicitly through extrastate security forces that operate with degrees of impunity alongside or in place of the military or police (most famously the autodefensas in Colombia and more recently the policías comunitarias in Mexico and milicias in Brazil) (Huggins 1991, Duncan 2006, Snodgrass Godoy 2006, Alves Ribeiro and Zaluar 2009, Burrell 2010). Lund (2011) has noted that these myriad notions of paramilitarism raise three interrelated questions for scholars throughout the hemisphere, questions that guide our collaborative work: At the conceptual level, what are the relations between the various forms of paramilitarism, from the “vulgar paramilitarism” (Lund 2011) of non-state militias to the militarization of local police? At the historical level, do these forms of paramilitarism share a common past and suggest a common history of violence in the...
Americas? And at the aesthetic level, how is paramilitarism represented and how do paramilitarists represent themselves?

There is a tendency in both contemporary scholarship and public discourse to present paramilitarism as a recent phenomenon, a product of the attenuated state of late global capitalism that is only loosely related to a longer historical trajectory. In seeking a more conceptually rigorous and historicized understanding of paramilitarism, it is essential to consider the relation between the range of paramilitary activity and the historical processes through which space has been secured, often in order to secure capital. Reflection on this relationship raises a number of questions on the critical possibilities and limits of thinking paramilitarism within a specifically capitalist geoculture: Does paramilitarism work to make the world safe for capital flows, arising in places not yet fully penetrated by capitalist accumulation or in places where capital is somehow threatened? Or, on the contrary, is paramilitarism a burden on the market efficiencies that make capitalism work? Similarly, is paramilitarism a handmaiden or a hindrance to the consolidation of the nation-form? What ties the paramilitary security forces of so-called developing economies to the paramilitarization of local police in zones more thoroughly integrated into the modern world economy? And following the provocative studies by Hahn (2005), what is the relation between paramilitary organization and modern democracy? A thorough engagement with these questions requires collaboration from scholars whose empirical and interpretative work represents a diversity of perspectives, methods and objects that can treat this matrix of problems in all its complexity.

This suggestive link between paramilitarism and a geoculture premised on capitalist expansion is at the heart of a hemispheric American fascination with the paramilitary figure. From gauchesca poetry to the bandit novel, from cinemetic Westerns to contemporary heroes of mass culture found in Iron Man, Django Unchained, or the founders of the Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia portrayed in the engrossing Colombian telenovela Tres Caínes, the American continent has a long tradition of telling its history and articulating its desires through paramilitary figures. In this sense, while at first glance, a conference and volume on paramilitarism may appear primarily relevant to certain fields in the social sciences, such as Security Studies and Political Science, much of the best work on the liminal conceptual space that paramilitaries inhabit between military and civilian, and citizen and outlaw, has emerged from the fields of Anthropology, Cultural Studies, Literary Studies, and History. Thus, this project also asks: What are the cultural representations, rhetorical devices and discursive structures that have integrated paramilitaries and their activities into the hemisphere's national and regional imaginaries and how has paramilitarism shaped the contours of those imaginaries?

In spite of the predominance of paramilitarist aesthetics within American cultural production, as well as the role of the figure of the paramilitary fighter in shaping the hemisphere's history, there is currently no scholarly work that places social, historical, and aesthetic aspects of this problem into dialogue. Men with Guns: Cultures of Paramilitarism and the Modern Americas intends to fill that gap by not privileging perspectives from the humanities over social sciences or vice versa, but rather by bringing these realms into a sustained exchange that will be made possible through the April 2015 symposium.

STRUCTURE OF THE SYMPOSIUM

The symposium will be held over two days at the University of Arizona in April 2015. We aim to have small panels of 2-3 papers. Papers will be distributed in advance, each presenter will be given 30 minutes, and ample time will be provided for discussion and debate. This structure is intended to facilitate an in-depth, comparative, and critical dialogue among the participants.
PARTICIPANTS

Topics covered by the presentations of participants will include the role of gender in paramilitary demobilization in Colombia; an ethnography of armed self-defense groups in Michoacán, Mexico; banditry and its prosecution in nineteenth-century Latin America; *juntas civiles de seguridad* in modern Guatemala; the militarization of the U.S.-Mexico border; an historical study of the relations between paramilitarism and capitalist development in Colombia; the relationship between the history of peasant paramilitarism and anti-liberal national Catholicism in Mexico; militarization of civilian police in the United States; and militias in Rio de Janeiro. We are also working to secure the contributions of two others (not included in our budget below) who will address the role of private military contractors in American wars of expansion and a history of the relations between civilian militias and the politics of race in the United States. The following are the confirmed contributors to the volume *Men with Guns*. Almost all have already confirmed participation in the Arizona symposium, a couple are still pending.

JENNIFER BURRELL  
Anthropology  
University at Albany, SUNY

JUAN PABLO DABOVE  
Spanish and Portuguese  
University of Colorado Boulder

KARA DANSKY  
Senior Counsel  
American Civil Liberties Union Center for Justice

GUSTAVO ROBERTO DUNCAN CRUZ  
Political Science  
Universidad de los Andes, Colombia

TIMOTHY DUNN  
Sociology  
Salisbury University

SALVADOR MALDONADO ARANDA  
Anthropology  
El Colegio de Michoacán, México

MICHEL MISSE  
Sociology  
Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro

MARIANA RIVERA  
Legal Advisor for the International Committee of the Red Cross  
Colombia

KIMBERLY THEIDON  
Anthropology  
Woodrow Wilson Center, Washington, D.C.  
Tufts University
HOW THE FORD-LASA WILL BE USED

The scope and significance of *Men with Guns: Cultures of Paramilitarism and the Modern Americas* will depend on a Ford-LASA Special Projects grant for seed funding, providing a necessary base to which our individual institutions, the University of Arizona and the University of Pittsburgh, can contribute resources in the form of space, staff support and additional financial resources.

**BUDGET**

International airfare for participants ($1300 x 5) $6,500
Domestic airfare for participants, including Lund ($600 x 7) $4,200
Hotel ($150 per night) 12 x 3 nights $5,400
Meals ($80 per day) 12 x 2 days $1,920
Advertising, printing programs $300

Total $18,420

**PROJECT MANAGERS**

Joshua Lund, University of Pittsburgh
Anne Garland Mahler, University of Arizona

Joshua Lund teaches courses on Latin American film, literature, political history and cultural politics. He has produced over a decade of conceptual, interpretive, and archival research on some of the most difficult problems in Latin American studies today. His past projects include the relations between race and critical thought in modern Mexico (*The Mestizo State*, 2012), the problem of hybridity theory for comparative multiculturalism (*The Impure Imagination*, 2006), a collaborative genealogy of the work of Gilberto Freyre (*Gilberto Freyre e os estudos latino-americanos*, 2006), and numerous essays on Latin American and US cultural politics, including the piece that serves as the impetus for this project, “The Poetics of Paramilitarism” (*Revista Hispânica Moderna*, 2011). He has broad experience organizing events, including, most recently, the international symposium “Becoming Mexico” at the University of Pittsburgh’s Humanities Center.

Anne Garland Mahler is an assistant professor in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese and affiliated faculty in Africana Studies and Latin American Studies at the University of Arizona. Her research, which has appeared in the *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies* (19.2, 2010), *U.S. Latino Writing* (Routledge UP, 2013) and *Latin American Research Review* (50.1, forthcoming), primarily focuses on hemispheric American studies and critical race theory. She is currently revising her manuscript, *The Global South: Cultural Politics and the Aesthetics of Resistance*, which traces the roots of a Global South political subjectivity and
consciousness within twentieth century inter-American radicalist thought. Mahler has extensive experience planning events, including an art exhibit in October 2014 and several guest lectures, as well as panels for LASA, MLA, ACLA and the Stone Center for Latin American Studies.

REFERENCES


