Ford LASA Special Projects
International Meeting Proposal for
Collaborative Research on Indigenous Peoples, Gender Justice and Legal Pluralism
in the United States, Mexico and Guatemala

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This proposal is to request funding for a meeting of an international research team comprised of researchers from four countries, to advance a trans-regional research collaboration focusing on indigenous women in the United States, Mexico, and Guatemala. We believe that this proposed meeting and the research it advances fit well within Ford LASA’s objective of funding projects that advance the principles of hemispheric collaboration among Latin American Studies Scholars. Below, we will first outline the future research project, then explain the importance of the international meeting for which we are requesting funding from Ford-LASA, and finally propose a budget for the meeting.

Research project:

The research project explores the experience of indigenous women in contexts of legal pluralism in the United States, Mexico and Guatemala. Indigenous women, because of societal biases around race, gender, and class, are often the most vulnerable to oppression, and also the most disadvantaged when seeking redress. In recent years, a variety of new justice venues at the local, national and international level have emerged or become increasingly available to indigenous women to constitute an increasingly complex context of legal pluralism. However, little research has been done to examine the implications of multiple justice systems for indigenous women in the context of alternative venues. This project investigates how women are engaging with state and non-state judicial systems, and what the effects of these engagements are on their lives. Understanding their experience will increase our knowledge of the complexities of legal pluralism and the impact of distinct legal and quasi-legal systems on the most marginalized and oppressed in society.

The study, a collaboration between researchers affiliated with the University of Texas at Austin and with the Center for Research and Graduate Education in Social Anthropology (CIESAS-Mexico), is
unique in its approach by defining the United States, Mexico and Guatemala as a focus. The literatures on indigenous people and on legal systems are entirely divided into North and South, between Native American Studies in USA and Canada, and Indigenous Studies in Latin America, setting up a false dichotomy of legal spaces and women’s experience that occludes important common dynamics. Our comparative focus, the result of years of collaboration in developing a shared conceptual framework, pushes the boundaries of the existing field and facilitates a more robust understanding of the dynamics in question. In addition, the project will allow us to reflect productively on the process of collaborative research as a mode of knowledge production. The project will produce a digital oral history archive and an academic edited volume that will be produced in English and Spanish. Through the oral histories, the project allows women’s stories to be the starting point for our understandings, and comparative ethnographic analysis will allow us to theorize from their experience, bridging the cultural divides of north and south. There are ten cases and research sites for this project:

**Guatemala:**
1) Local Justice: “Q’eqchi’ Women Contesting Impunity in Local Court” Sepur Zarco, Department of Izabal.
   Dr. Irma Alicia Velasquez Nimatuj (Independent Maya-Kiche’ scholar, Guatemala), Guatemala City,
2) Judicialización y violencia de género: disputas sobre los recursos naturales en Alta Verapaz,
3) Guatemala
   Dr. Rachel Sieder (Researcher, CIESAS-Mexico)
   Dr. Morna Macleod (Researcher, Autonomous State University of Morelos-UAEM)

**Mexico**
   Dr. María Teresa Sierra (Researcher, CIESAS-Mexico)
   Dr. Mariana Mora (Researcher, CIESAS-Mexico)
   Dr. Vivian Newdick (Affiliated Researcher, UT Austin)

**United States:**
We intend to seek major foundation funding to carry out this two-year project. A proposal has already been prepared and submitted to the National Endowment for the Humanities. While it did not receive funding in this round, it was very highly ranked, and we are resubmitting a revised proposal in December 2014. A funding proposal has also been submitted to CONACYT in Mexico. The research protocol has already received IRB Human Subjects approval through the Institutional Review Board at the University of Texas at Austin (IRB protocol #2013-12-0041).

**Ford-LASA Special Project funding Request:**

We are requesting funding from the Ford-LASA Special Projects program in order to hold a four-day meeting of the research team in Mexico City in February 2015. Mexico City was selected as the site of the meeting principally for cost-saving purposes, as five of the ten researchers are based there. This meeting has three important purposes, each of which are critical to advancing the project successfully.

1) The meeting will allow us to **strategize and collaboratively develop funding proposals**.

Significant funding is crucial for the success of this ambitious project, as the relatively large number of researchers and research sites requires adequate funds to conduct field research. In addition, the collaborative nature of the project necessitates international meetings in the course of the research and after its completion, requiring additional funds. The Ford LASA-funded meeting in Mexico will bring together the researchers, currently residing in four different
countries (Guatemala, Mexico, the US and Canada) to brainstorm, innovate, and collectively produce a robust, cutting edge research proposal to garner the needed funding. This process will involve presentations of key theoretical concepts and findings from preliminary research.

2) The meeting will allow us to **strategize and develop a coordinated data collection plan for conducting comparable research** that is well-grounded in our research cases. Because the project entails ten case studies in three countries at a variety of scales (from local to transnational), it is crucial that we hone and fine-tune our approach to the research in the individual case studies, so that we are able to produce data that is analogous and leads to a shared analysis of dynamics throughout the trans-regional area of study. We will use this meeting to develop a shared methodology, presenting methods, strategies, mistakes and successes to one another.

3) The meeting will allow us to continue to **develop a strong rapport that will strengthen our ability to work together productively**. While this may not seem as important as the other aspects of the meeting, we believe it is every bit as crucial. Meeting in person rather than coordinating exclusively through electronic media allows for the development of human working relationships that are crucial to the conduct of collaborative research. Because of the extraordinary level of both practical coordination required by a project of this kind, and the potential for generation of shared analysis and intellectual production, these working relationships are as important to its successful elaboration as are strong funding sources and strong research credentials of the individual researchers alone.

While collaboration in research is richly generative and, in a project of this size, allows for both anthropological depth and trans-regional breadth of analysis, it requires substantially more resources, more coordination and contemplation of shared methodological assumptions and practices, and very strong interpersonal relations between the members of the research team. The Ford LASA meeting in Mexico City will provide us with an indispensable opportunity to fully develop each of these key
components of our collaborative trans-regional research. In doing so, it clearly helps to advance principles of hemispheric collaboration among Latin Americanist scholars, as all of the researchers on this project are LASA members, and we seek not only to develop such a collaboration, but to reflect upon it as part of the larger contributions of the research.

**Proposed Budget:**

**Airfare:**
1 RT Guatemala-Mexico City .................................................. $600
2 RT Austin-Mexico City 2@$450) ............................................ $900
1 RT Portland-Mexico City .................................................. $850
1 RT Kelowna-Mexico City .................................................. $800

**Local transportation in Mexico:**
10@$40 ........................................................................................ $400

**Hotel (all participants will stay at the meeting site):**
10@$75/night, 3 nights .......................................................... $2,250

**Meeting Venue:**
3 days @ $500/day .................................................................. $1,500

**Meals:**
Breakfasts 3 days@$15/person ................................................ $450
Lunches 3 days@$20/person .................................................. $600
Dinners 3 days@$30/person .................................................. $900
Coffee service for meetings $75/day ...................................... $225

**Local administrative support** ............................................. $1,500

**Materials (office supply)** .................................................... $150

**Participant travel stipend (to compensate time and defray unpaid travel expenses)**
10@$150 .................................................................................. $1,500

**Total** ................................................................................. $12,425