


dominion, n. 1. Control or the exercise of control. 2. A territory or sphere of influence; a realm. 3. A self-governing nation in the British Commonwealth.

The Dominion

news from the grassroots

www.dominionpaper.ca • July 2009 • Issue #61

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From Memory to Resistance, Children Bear Witness HIJOS celebrates 10 years in Guatemala

by Jackie McVicar

TATAMAGOUCHE, NS—Walking through the streets of Guatemala City, HIJOS slogans are hard to miss: “Justice for Nueva Linda”; “Trial and Punishment for Military Assassins!” Words demanding an end to impunity remind everyone that 36 years of civil war in Guatemala have not ended in justice or peace.

HIJOS Guatemala—Sons and Daughters for Identity and Justice Against Forgetting and Silence—was founded in 1999 by young people who were forced into exile, or who lost family members due to State repression during the war. (The group’s name, HIJOS, is a play on the Spanish word for “children.”) In June 2009, HIJOS Guatemala celebrated 10 years of fighting

to preserve historical memory, to end impunity, to memorialize the victims of the war, and to shed light on the human rights violations committed during the conflict.

Using public education events, protests, and political art and murals to articulate and strengthen the movement toward justice, HIJOS is comprised of students, workers and professionals of Ladinos (Guatemalans of mixed Hispanic and Indigenous origin) and Indigenous descent. A new generation of HIJOS is now being born as those who started the group 10 years ago pass on to their *bijos* the struggle of those before them. HIJOS members—including children of the disappeared and murdered, and Guatemalans who stand in solidarity with the group—work in rural communi-

ties as well as in the urban centre of Guatemala City. While many group members hold “day jobs” with other human rights and social justice organizations, they are more than simply volunteers for HIJOS; for many, HIJOS is a way of life, an extended family.

HIJOS not only focuses on justice for past crimes, but also draws attention to new threats Guatemalans face today. In a recent bulletin, HIJOS stated: “According to our interpretation of the history and the memory of the resistance of the People, we understand justice to be a historical demand of the grassroots struggle for dignity, sovereignty and self-determination.”

Bety Reyes Toledo knows HIJOS well. Reyes Toledo is the daughter of Hector Reyes, a Guatemalan peasant who, after trying

to organize workers and obtaining evidence of back-door dealings involving the owners of the Nueva Linda plantation where he worked, was kidnapped and disappeared on September 5, 2003. Reyes Toledo, her family, and over 170 other families have been camped on the side of the road outside the plantation since 2004, demanding justice and information on the whereabouts of her father.

“HIJOS has been with us throughout our struggle and because of them, more people have become involved. They help give us the strength to go on because we feel supported,” said Reyes Toledo. HIJOS, in collaboration with other social justice organizations, has arranged food and clothing drives, the “Caravan for Justice” on the anniversary of the disappearance of Hector Reyes and protests

to support justice for the Reyes family and all families and workers at Nueva Linda.

But not everyone is happy with HIJOS' call for an end to impunity. The group has experienced threats and acts of intimidation, including office break-ins and an attempted kidnapping. Members of HIJOS have been victims of political campaigns and attacked through the Guatemalan media. According to a June 2008 "Urgent Action" (a call to action sent to HIJOS' national and international solidarity networks), one member was followed, beaten up on the street and warned to tell others to back off a public demilitarization campaign that involved HIJOS and 15 other organizations, or suffer the consequences.

The group continued its work and 2008 marked the first year the military parade was suspended from its annual June 30 march through Guatemala's historic centre.

"For HIJOS Guatemala, who have been going out into the streets...to point out [and] to reject the criminal presence of the army and its high command which acts in total impunity, the suspension of the parade is a victory that has been won thanks to the people who year after year have marched in light of threats, attacks and repression," said Wendy Mendez,

a human rights defender and co-founder of HIJOS Guatemala.

In fact, HIJOS' June 30 anniversary falls on the same day as Guatemala's annual military parade—a day now known, thanks to the efforts of HIJOS and

"We do not need another study into the authenticity of the facts. We need a judicial investigation, trial and punishment for those responsible."

others, as the "Day of Heroes and Martyrs."

"Along the way we have learned that the struggle for memory, truth and justice in Guatemala is a long and historical process for the survivors of genocide, therefore it has many actions, strategies and chapters that must be written in order for those democratic principles to become a reality." Mendez said that stopping the Military March was one such action on the road to democracy and peace.

Born in Guatemala, Mendez and her family fled to Vancouver, B.C., after witnessing the forced disappearance of her mother, Luz Haydee Mendez, by the Guatemalan Military Intelligence on March 8, 1984.

Following its investigation between April 1997 and February 1999, the United Nations

Commission for Historical Clarification (CEH)—a commission created through the peace negotiations and the Accord of Oslo in 1994—reported that state forces and related paramilitary groups were responsible for 93 per

cent of the violations documented by the CEH, including 92 per cent of arbitrary executions and 91 per cent of forced disappearances. Victims included men, women and children of all social strata: workers, professionals, church members, politicians, peasants, students and academics; in ethnic terms, 80 per cent were Indigenous Maya. During the 36-year conflict, the CEH reported that over 200,000 men and women were killed or disappeared. Forced disappearance is a war tactic used to systematically terrorize a population. 626 villages were completely destroyed, 1.5 million people were displaced by the violence, and more than 150,000 were driven to seek refuge in Mexico.

Ten years after the release of the report, the numbers are estimated to be higher still as clandestine graves continue to be

exhumed and those once unwilling to talk about *la violencia* have begun to open up and tell their stories.

To date, however, none of the intellectual authors of the war—including military high command and civilians in power during the violence in the early 1980s—have been tried, let alone convicted.

The recent presentation of the Guatemalan Presidential Peace Secretariat's "Report on the Authenticity of the Military Diary" verified facts found in a military dossier detailing crimes committed by the military during the civil war. The dossier was smuggled from Guatemalan military intelligence files in 1999. Given the release of historical documents from the national policy archive that affirm these details, Mendez is disappointed with the Guatemalan government's unwillingness to act on its own findings. She reiterated the sentiment of those who continue to struggle for justice: "We do not need another study into the authenticity of the facts. We need a judicial investigation, trial and punishment for those responsible."

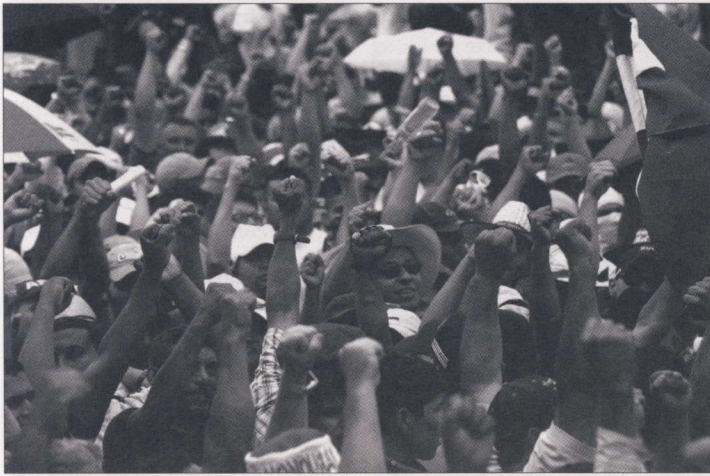
It has been 13 years since the state and the URNG (Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity) signed the Peace Accords for

continued on page 21



photographs by James Rodriguez, mimundo.org

Opposite page: HIJOS and supporters march "From Memory To Resistance," replacing, for the second year in a row, Guatemala's annual June 30 Military Parade in the historic centre of Guatemala City. Left: Historian Alfonso Bauer Paiz attends the parade for his fourth year in a row. Middle: HIJOS in May. Standing centre is Wendy Mendez. Right: "We Do Not Forget:" Guatemalan youth are only too aware of the complex web of oppression their parents suffered—oppression that continues to affect their lives through the power of the military, the corruption of police forces, the imposition of corporate interests and the exploitation of natural resources by foreign companies.



Tragedy at Toncontin

by Dominion Contributors,
photographs by James Rodriguez

Manuel “Mel” Zelaya, the democratically elected president of Honduras, was removed from the country during a military coup on June 28. Major demonstrations have been calling for his return, but the corporate media has virtually ignored them. Transcribed below is an interview from the Real News Network with Dominion correspondent Sandra Cuffe, who was at the Tegucigalpa airport on July 5, awaiting Zelaya’s return.

“When the march was approaching the airport—and at first there was the roadblock set up by soldiers one kilometre away from the airport [to] stop it from getting to the airport, and there were other roadblocks set up on the way to the march, so that people who hadn’t joined the march from the very beginning,

this morning at the Tegucigalpa University, and were heading to the airport or to meet up with the march, couldn’t even get that far. So I had gotten through one of the roadblocks and made it to the airport. I was there when the march finally arrived. And the march—which was probably two, three times the size it had been in the past couple of days, so we’re talking, like, literally hundreds and hundreds of thousands of people—managed to get to the airport, because they actually kept advancing peacefully, slowly, and steadily, and pushing back soldiers and the police all the way back to the airport. [...]

Everybody who’s participating is against the coup, they’re against a rupture of democracy, and therefore [are demanding] the return of the elected president. That’s pretty much clear across the board.”

On the day ousted President Manuel Zelaya was to return, thousands of people gathered at the *Universidad Pedagógica* to march to the airport to welcome him.

However, at one end of the airport some demonstrators started cutting the mesh fencing around the landing strip. At that point, the military threw tear gas and shot at the demonstrators, killing at least one person. During the course of the night, three others died in hospitals and several more were seriously injured.

Although security forces created several blockades, in the end the police and the military decided to allow the demonstrators to advance to the airport.

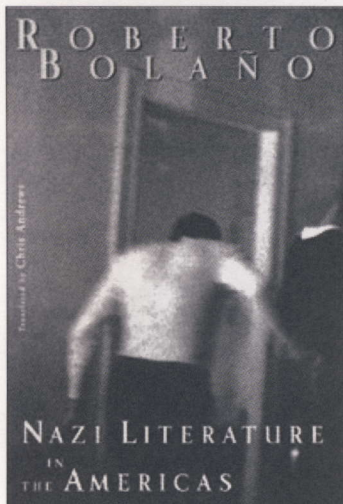
“The army has shot at a completely unarmed civil population. For more than five hours the people were respectful of the army and of the police. [...] The people were not bringing sticks, were not bringing weapons. [...] There was no need to shoot. Many were trying to remove the mesh [to enter the landing strip], it is not possible to deny that. But it was not necessary to shoot the people with bullets.”

—César Omar Silva,
television journalist, Channel 8

To read more, check out the Media Co-op’s
Honduras Working Group
mediacoop.ca/group/1670

James Rodriguez is an independent photo-documentarian currently based in Guatemala. To contact, and for more of his work, please visit www.mimundo.org.





Nazi Literature in the Americas
Roberto Bolaño
New Directions, 2008

Roberto Bolaño's *Nazi Literature in the Americas* operates on a principle expressed by the narrator of another of the late Chilean's novels, *The Savage Detectives*: "In one sense, the name of the group is a joke. At the same time, it's completely in earnest." The speaker is talking about a literary faction, but he could easily be referring to the enterprise that is *Nazi Literature*, a book structured as a "Who's Who" of the Latin American literary community's extreme right wing. With each chapter taking on the form of a short biography followed by several handily provided appendices, the project reads initially like a Borgesian prank. But in the end, the sheer doggedness of the work (the joke-teller shows no signs of abatement) lends the tone a strange bleakness that persists after the formal novelty has worn off.

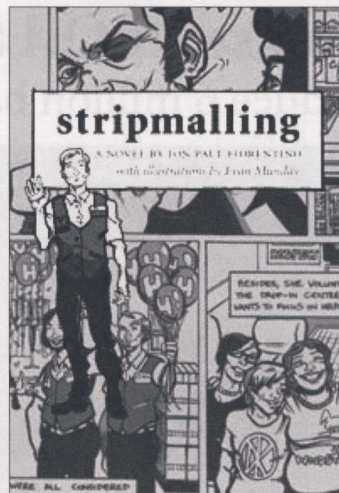
In reading Bolaño it becomes

apparent almost immediately that he was an insatiable reader and active literary scenester. But *Nazi Literature's* peculiar strength is that it evinces a mind actively channeling, re-coding and at times parodying all of the writing that has been so zealously absorbed. Beyond the virtuosic, universe-creating scope of the book, Bolaño tests the limits of readerly empathy with his characters; a parade of fascist monsters striving to make their own art through personal strife and political turmoil. Within such stories of artistic development, we are conditioned to root for success: the publication of the novel, the acquisition of enough means to pursue one's craft, the achievement of some expression of vision. Such assumptions do not hold up, however, when what follows is a sentence like the one that concludes the chapter on fictional poet Jim O'Bannon: "He remained firm in his disdain for Jews and homosexuals to the end, although at the time of his death he was beginning, gradually, to accept African Americans."

With this mysterious and bracing book, Bolaño the mischief-maker reminds us that writers are neither saints nor saviours, that they ought not be lionized by virtue of their vocation and that they are, above all, a product of their time and place. It's a joke worth hearing.

Nazi Literature in the Americas is newly available in paperback.

—Robert Kotyk



Stripmalling
Jon Paul Fiorentino
ECW Press, 2009

Whenever someone gets around to writing the Great Canadian Novel, it ought to take place in a land of big-box stores and cluttered, unremarkable suburbs. It is not an easy place to write about. For the bulk of its population, Canada isn't a country of wide-open spaces and endless, frozen landscapes. From most angles, it's a practical place full of modest lives that don't offer a lot of dramatic material for epic narratives. Jon Paul Fiorentino seems to be looking in the right place for a truly Canadian narrative in *Stripmalling*, his debut novel/autobiography with illustrations by Evan Munday.

When he keeps his story in the suburbs of Winnipeg, Fiorentino explores the darker aspects of the standard strip mall upbringing: the hopeless teenage jobs, the promiscuity, the fights and the boredom. But these familiar fragments are not at the core of the book. *Stripmalling*

is really a novel about a young man who uncovers a creative instinct and leaves the strip mall to eventually write a novel called *Stripmalling*. Fiorentino attempts a quirky metanarrative, but nothing remarkable materializes in the text itself or the world beyond.

This is a diary of sorts. And you probably shouldn't publish your diary until you're dead. Too much of Fiorentino's writing contains insights he should have kept to himself. An opening paragraph which references the "necessary unreliability of memory" serves as an early warning that for a book hyped on its comedic charm, someone is trying to make it awfully heavy. And there would be nothing wrong with that if so much of the novel didn't come across as juvenile pontificating. For every nostalgic and vaguely beautiful image of a sprawling landscape, Fiorentino provides at least one empty rumination ("I do not want to thrive in YOUR world," "Mine is a static literature."). We never get the hidden stories of strip mall lives; we get romanticized pictures of places young Canadian authors glorify too often. Jonny ends up in Montreal (where else?), in the same cafes where, "Everyone is a writer, or was." Despite initial promises, Fiorentino spews out stories of poverty, drugs and heartbreak like any other gloomy Mile-End amateur. Instead of sparking a literary imagination in under-explored places, *Stripmalling* reminds me of so many of my own strip mall nights: disappointing and easy to forget.

—Shane Patrick Murphy

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ISLEÑA	155 SAN PEDRO SULA	07:55 CANCELADO
TACA	701 GUATEMALA	09:30 CANCELADO
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