Lynching as Civil Disobedience:
Resisting Socialist Education “In the Name of Christ” (Mexico, 1932-1936)*
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This paper constitutes a preliminary attempt to conceptualize and historicize lynching acts in Mexico as a manifestation of civil disobedience. Conceptually, I will claim that lynchings can be interpreted as “performative practices” (Weeden 2008: 15) that, through their reiteration and “iterability”, produce a self-legitimizing and exclusionary exercise of citizenship that serves to reassert the autonomy, security and wellbeing of certain communities. This exercise of citizenship is based on the disobedience of and resistance to what is perceived as an illegitimate exercise of law and authority on behalf of the state and, in this regards, they may be read as acts that share some of the attributes of the ‘Arendtian’ civil disobedient. Historically, I will concentrate on a particular series of lynching acts that took place around the period of 1932 to1936 in Mexico, a period that comprises both the upsurge of what has been called the “Second Cristiada” (1932-1934) (Guerra Manzo 2008: 111) as well as the implementation of the “Educación Socialista” project (1934-1936) under the Lázaro Cardenas government. These lynchings were directed against the “maestros socialistas” (the “socialist teachers”), who played a pivotal role as bearers of the anti-clerical and secularizing undertone of the latter project and who, as such, embodied the legal and political order that would be disobeyed and resisted violently by some of these communities (Kay Vaughan 1988, Raby 1981). My historical analysis is informed by archival material I collected from the Archivo General de la Nacion in Mexico City during the summer of 2010 with the support of a Janey Program Fellowship.