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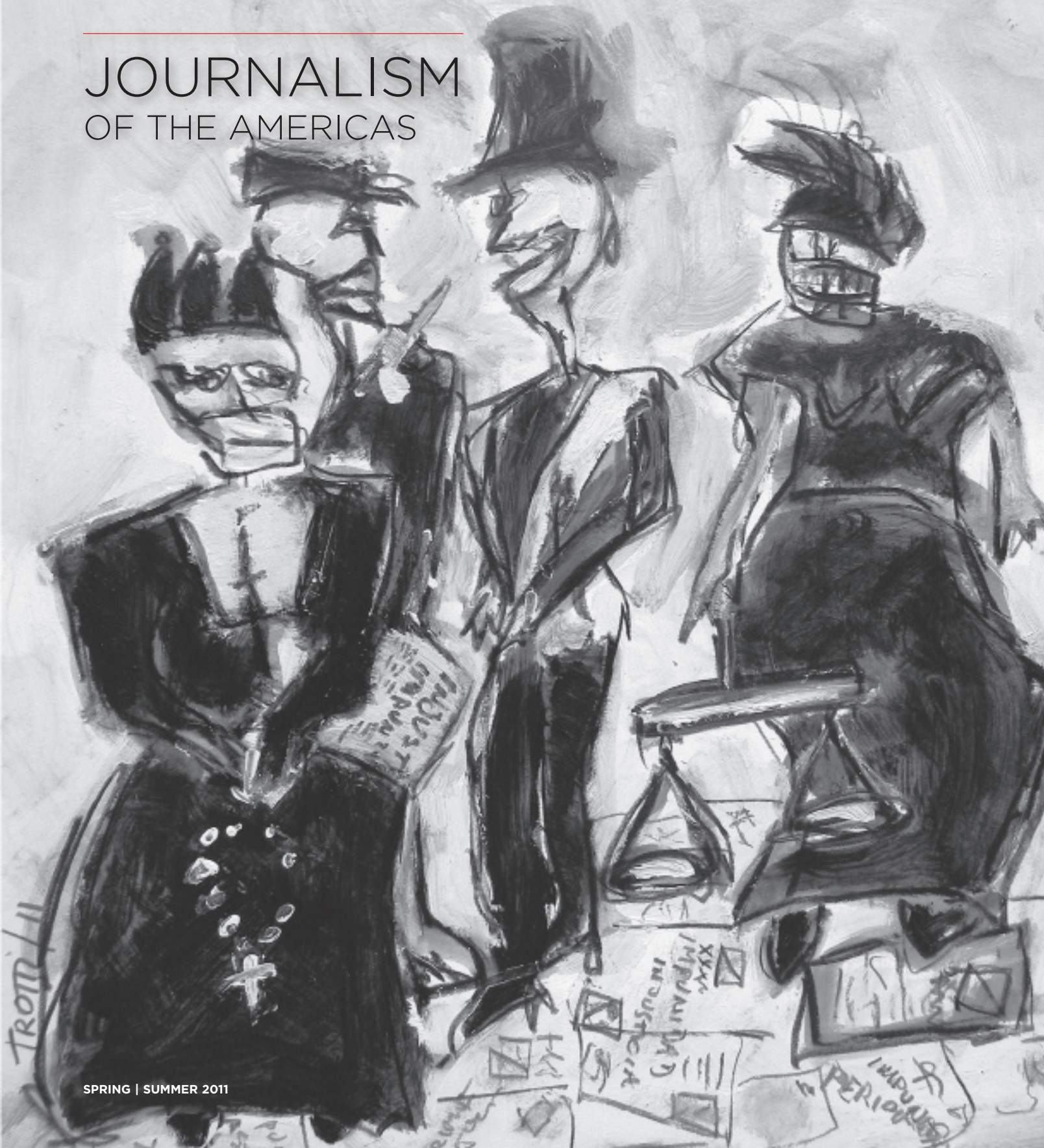
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# ReVista

HARVARD REVIEW OF LATIN AMERICA

## JOURNALISM OF THE AMERICAS



SPRING | SUMMER 2011

# The Best Job in the World

I always assumed Róbinson Rojas was Dominican. For decades now, I've been carrying around his words or posting them on my walls. I was given these inspiring words by my dear friend, the photojournalist Ramón DeJesús Lora, then a Dominican exile, when I entered Columbia School of Journalism in 1969.

"A la pequeña legión de periodistas latinoamericanos y norteamericanos, anónimos en su mayoría, que cada día son humillados, son ofendidos y hasta torturados moralmente, porque están empeñados en una tarea peligrosa: descubrir la verdad." That translates as, "To the small legion of Latin American and North American journalists, anonymous for the most part, who every day are humiliated, insulted and even morally tortured because they are bent on carrying out a dangerous task: to discover the truth."

I went to journalism school before Watergate, which for many was a watershed in journalistic truth seeking. But my neighbors in a Dominican neighborhood of New York, including Ramón, had already taught me the value and perils of truth seeking in journalism; they had experienced the Trujillo dictatorship and the U.S. invasion of Santo Domingo. Journalism was their lifeline.

Rojas' words served as a model for my life as a foreign correspondent—whether in Bogotá, Managua or even eventually Berlin. The part about danger became more and more painfully personal. My friend Richard Cross and our colleague Dial Torgerson were blown up by a land mine in northern Nicaragua; Linda Frazier, a reporter for the Tico Times in Costa Rica, who had planted roses in my San José garden, was killed by a bomb intended for contra leader Eden Pastora; other reporters met their fate in Central American crossfire.

Yes, there were risks, as the courageous journalists in Mexico are experiencing now. Journalism can be scary, but the truth is, it's also fun and exciting. We journalists like to tell stories; we like to figure out sources, and, yes, we like to ferret out the truth.

That's why practicing journalism in Latin America is both enriching and challenging. It's a continent of story tellers. It's a continent where truth is often hidden, but where reporters, through digging, can bring down governments or put into motion international indignation about human rights abuses. It was, after all, the death of a courageous editor, Pedro Joaquín Chamorro, that brought down the decades-long Somoza dictatorship in Managua.

Gabriel García Márquez called journalism the best job in the world. I couldn't agree more. "Journalism," he said in a 1996 speech to the Inter American Press Association, "is an unappeasable passion that can be assimilated and humanized only through stark confrontation with reality."

In addition to my job as editor-in-chief of ReVista, I teach journalism at Harvard Extension School. Sometimes my students confront me and ask me if journalism is dead, and why am I not teaching them tweeting and social media and blogs. And I insist that those are the new tools of journalism, and very valuable tools, but to practice journalism, one must understand how to report and write and search for the truth.

Many of the journalists in this issue are involved with new ways of story telling; all of them are committed to truth seeking. With still relatively low but growing Internet penetration, Latin American journalism has the advantage of time to prepare in a creative way for a digital future.

As I began to write this editor's letter, I realized that after a recent move, I had Róbinson Rojas' words tucked inside some unpacked box. I resort to Google, thinking that I will never be able to find the quote. It pops up immediately. And after 42 years, I discover that Róbinson Rojas was not Dominican, but Chilean.



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SPRING | SUMMER 2011

VOLUME X NO. 2

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### ON THE COVER

Illustration by Ricardo Trotti

The Latin American press has long suffered from attacks on press freedom. Today, journalists and their media face pressures from governments, power elites and extralegal groups. Ricardo Trotti, director of Press Freedom for the Inter American Press Association and an established artist, created this image to illustrate some of those threats. His artwork can be found throughout this issue (see pages 2, 7, 15, 17, 19, 20, 23, 25, 29, 30, and inside back cover).



## Attacking the Press

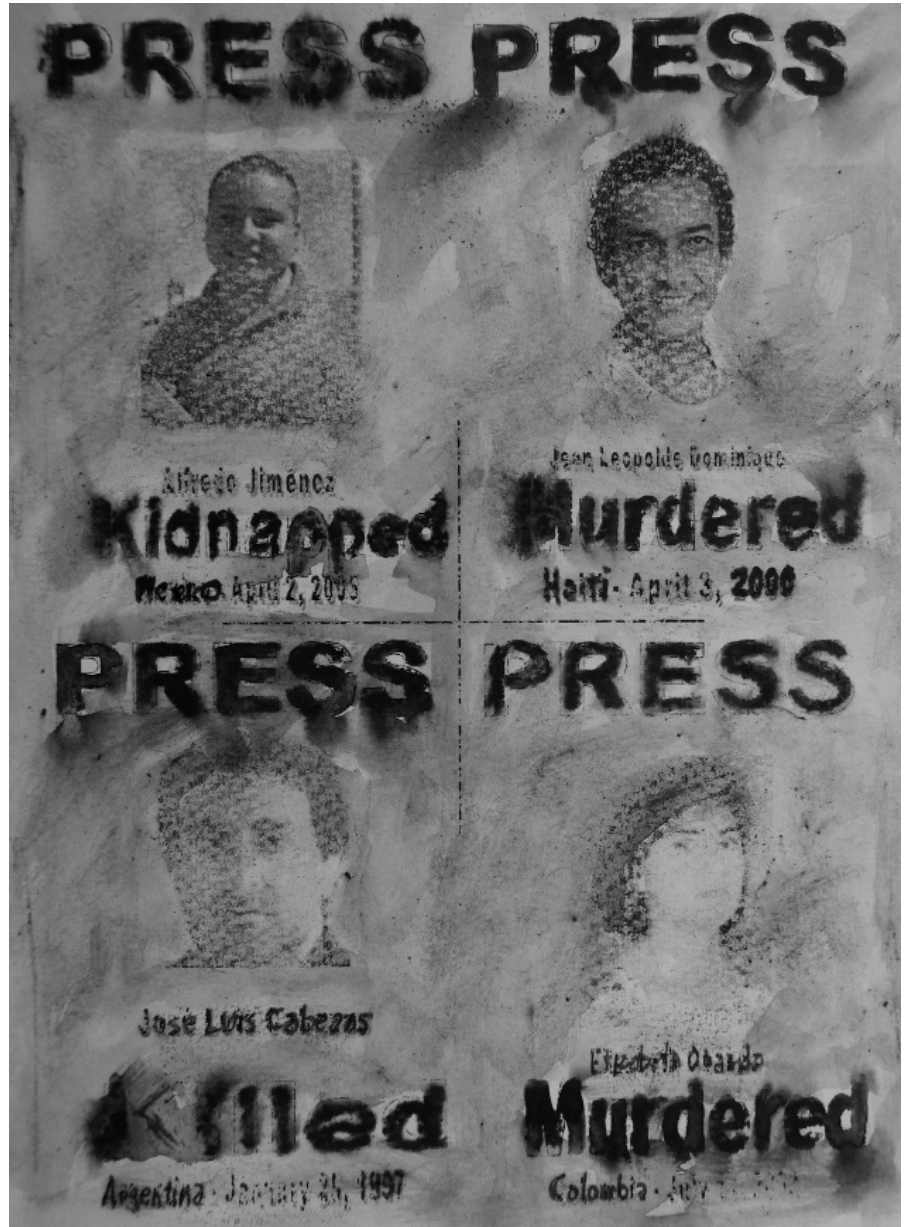
BY GONZALO MARROQUÍN

THE PARKING GARAGE IN A CIUDAD JUÁREZ shopping center was splashed with blood on the afternoon of September 16, 2010. Photographers Luis Carlos Santiago Orozco, 21, and Carlos Manuel Sánchez Colunga, 18, had been on a lunch break at the mall when they were gunned down. That morning, they had participated in a photography course at *El Diario*, where both of the young men were interns. Orozco died and Sánchez Colunga was seriously injured.

The young photographers are not isolated cases of attacks on journalists. In just 13 days last year, from June 28 to July 10, four journalists in the Mexican states of Nuevo León, Michoacán and Guerrero died violent deaths. Such cases are prevalent enough to appear even in fictional accounts. In a recent novel, *Tijuana: crimen y olvido* (Tusquets, 2010), the protagonists, a young woman reporter from Tijuana and a journalist from San Diego, both disappear.

The situation in Mexico is perhaps the most serious on the continent for both common citizens and journalists. That is why this issue of *ReVista*, which examines some of the issues affecting the press in Latin America, has devoted an entire section to the Mexican situation. In 2010, Latin America became the most dangerous region in the world for journalists. Mexico ended the the year mourning the murders of 11 journalists; another nine were killed in Honduras, two in Brazil and one in Colombia. In the face of this overwhelming violence, the Inter American Press Association (IAPA) has pointed out how this often translates into self-censorship, and thus into a violation of another fundamental principle: the right of citizens to be informed. It is therefore imperative to put an end to the violence and impunity for crimes against journalists.

For IAPA, ending this situation is one



of its most important challenges. One of our priorities is to exhort governments and intergovernmental bodies to propose and establish more active and effective methods to counteract violence and impunity. Thus we have publicly asked the Organization of American States (OAS),

the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR), and the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA), the Latin American Association for Integration (ALADI), the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and the Andean Development Corporation (CAF),

among others, to formulate actions to do away with this scourge of violence, as well as plans to reject any measures that affect press freedom and the full exercise of democracy.

Aggressions and attacks against journalists and the media have occurred in all periods in Latin America. Bombs have destroyed entire newspaper buildings because of press denunciations against political power, the military and drug trafficking when Pablo Escobar was the drug lord in Colombia. These days, however, attacks against journalists are aggravated by a climate of confrontation and polarization generated by populist governments such as those of Hugo Chávez, Rafael Correa, Evo Morales, Daniel Ortega and Cristina de Kirchner.

In Cuba, where the government has maintained fierce control for the last 52 years over press freedom, the right to free expression of ideas and access of citizens to information without state censorship, we rejoiced about the release last year of 18 journalists from prison. These journalists had been condemned to severe and unjust prison sentences for exercising their right to freedom of the press. Yet the price of freedom for these journalists was mandatory exile, an act that constitutes a grave human rights violation. Another seven independent Cuban journalists are still in jail.

#### GOOD SIGNS

We are encouraged that several governments in the region are committed to ending violence and impunity and are taking steps to do something about it. For example, in November 2010 the Peruvian government created a special legal jurisdiction to try serious crimes against journalists (murders, injuries, kidnapping and extortion). This is a measure that IAPA, in conjunction with the Coun-

cil of Peruvian Press, had been urging for several years.

We are also pleased that in 2010 five criminals were condemned for murders committed in Brazil and Venezuela, and another 11 have been imprisoned or arrested and awaiting trial in Colombia, El Salvador, Honduras and Mexico.

Since 1995, IAPA, with funding from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, has prioritized the search for justice for murdered journalists and punishment for the perpetrators. As a result, since 1995 until August 2010, 126 murderers of journalists have been condemned, a statistic that contrasts with the five murderers receiving sentences before 1995. This drop in the impunity rate was highlighted

ico gathered in several forums in Hermosillo and Mexico City in recent years have attested.

In addition, in a joint mission with the Committee for the Protection of Journalists (CPJ), we visited President Felipe Calderón, who committed himself to implement a centralized system of protection for Mexican journalists and to promote legislation making crimes against freedom of expression to be federal crimes. In July 2010, a Special Prosecutor's Office was established to investigate crimes against freedom of expression. Unlike a similar office operating since 2006, the new office enjoys investigative autonomy and the authority to try cases. Despite the grim news from Mexico,

### **Compiling statistics on fatalities—each representing a family yearning for justice—is a commitment that humanizes our task of safeguarding press freedom.**

in an independent journalistic study solicited by the Knight Foundation entitled “La muerte de la noticia: Muchas crónicas quedan sin publicar debido a los asesinatos de periodistas latinoamericanos,” [www.kflinks.com/sip](http://www.kflinks.com/sip) (Killing the News: Stories Go Untold as Latin American Journalists Die, [www.kflinks.com/iapa](http://www.kflinks.com/iapa)).

Our register of journalists in the last 15 years shows that the 230 killed include 19 who disappeared, some of whom are presumed dead. For IAPA, the mere compiling of these statistics about fatalities, each of which represents a family yearning for justice, is an urgent commitment that humanizes our task of safeguarding freedoms of the press and expression, themes that we have been demanding for more than a decade, as editors from Mex-

these are positive steps.

Another of the “good signs” is in Colombia. The legal reform that increased the statute of limitation for crimes against journalists to 30 years paid heed to recommendations that we made in a legal study entitled “Injusticia Premiada: Un análisis de la impunidad de los crímenes contra periodistas en Colombia” (“Injustice Rewarded: An Analysis of Impunity for Crimes Committed Against Journalists in Colombia”), co-sponsored by IAPA and the Association of Colombian Newspapers (ANDIARIOS), the results of which we presented in Bogotá in 2008 to members of the legislative and judicial branches, who committed themselves to making the suggested reforms.

Another surprising decision in Colom-

bia was that the Attorney General's Office declared the 1986 murder of newspaper editor Guillermo Cano to be a crime against humanity. The Cano case was one of the first emblematic cases investigated by IAPA. The recent decision means that the crime will stay on the books since it is presumed that it was part of a systematic plan by the Medellín Cartel, headed by drug trafficker Pablo Escobar. The Colombian Attorney General's Office also committed itself to reopening 27 other murder cases throughout the country, many of which are currently languishing or just filed away.

In spite of these good signs on the part of several governments, it would not be wise to get overly dazzled since our experience has shown us that many promises just stay promises.

#### ON THE SUPRANATIONAL LEVEL

From the start of our project to publicize unpunished crimes against journalists, we have had the vision of joining the Interamerican justice and human rights systems by entering into negotiations with governments to resolve individual cases in the courts and continuing to make recommendations for legal and judicial reforms to combat the impunity that affects and will affect others.

Part of our work has been with the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR). We have brought 27 journalistic investigations to the court since 1997. Three of these cases have resulted in friendly settlement agreements. The most recent was in Brazil, in which the state of Bahia recognized its responsibility in the crime and paid an indemnity to the family of journalist Manoel Leal de Oliveira, who was murdered in 1998. In 2001, we reached a friendly settlement agreement with Guatemala in the case of journalist Irma Flaquer, who was forcibly disappeared in 1980, her son murdered as she was dragged away and never seen again. The agreement included many important reparation measures, including indemnifying eight members of the victim's family, naming a street in Guatemala in her honor, scholarships in her name,

and publication of materials related to her work, including a book of her newspaper columns and a documentary.

On January 30, 2002, Orlando Sierra Hernández, deputy editor of *La Patria* of Manizales in the Colombian department (state) of Caldas, was murdered. The murder took place as he arrived at

## IAPA must strengthen its programs through education and training so that the impunity that accompanies crimes against journalists becomes a “problem for all.”

work at two in the afternoon with his eight-year-old daughter in the back seat of his car. A security camera filmed the moment in which the paid assassin shot him three times in the head.

Since then, IAPA has been making independent investigations and keeping a close watch on developments in this case. Several triggermen were accused, judged and sentenced. Finally, eight years after the murder, two former congressmen—father and son—were indicted as the instigators of the crime. The two had been criticized by Sierra in the newspaper.

IAPA publicly congratulated the Colombian Attorney General's Office “for not giving up in its effort to seek justice for these types of crime against journalism and the entire society,” saying that this display of perseverance and firmness by the authorities serves as an example and at the same time a warning to criminals used to operating with impunity. This is the motor that propels IAPA to continue with its work.

#### IMPUNITY: “A PROBLEM FOR ALL”

Because impunity is a problem for everyone, we began to adjust the objectives of our project. In addition to investigations, we have begun to train journalists to give them tools that might secure their safety. We have also sponsored judicial and legislative forums, as well as meetings with affected journalists and government au-

thorities. We have conducted education campaigns about impunity through advertising and posters published in newspapers and websites.

To expand our focus on impunity, we have worked with the Supreme Courts in Latin America (for example, in the Dominican Republic in 2007) and with

other counterpart organizations, as in Guatemala in 1997. At the end of this summer (2011), we will be holding a hemispheric conference in Puebla, Mexico, on legal and judicial reforms necessary to combat impunity.

We are also involved with a song and composition contest that we've called “Dona tu voz para los que no tienen voz” (Donate your voice to the voiceless) to select a hymn against impunity and to publicize this problem among younger audiences and through social networks.

We are aware that some progress has been achieved, but there is still a long way to go. As the independent study by the Knight Foundation has indicated, it is necessary to strengthen our original objective so that the impunity that accompanies crimes against journalists becomes a “problem for all.”

*Gonzalo Marroquín is president of the Inter American Press Association. President of the newspapers Siglo 21 and alDía, he was editor-in-chief of the newspaper Prensa Libre in Guatemala for fifteen years. As a journalist, he worked in several Guatemalan media as a reporter and photographer and eventually as an editor. He has also worked as a correspondent for international news agencies since 1972. He was president of the Guatemalan Journalists' Association (1984-85).*





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# REFLECTIONS

Murder, censorship and hostile environments challenge Latin American journalists. They also concern themselves with spotty journalism training, the lack of presence of international colleagues in the region and the need to create new journalistic models in a digital world. Here are some reflections on the profession's challenges and realities today in Latin America.

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# Latin American Nieman Fellows

## Portraying Journalism's Realities **BY BOB GILES**

**A FEW DAYS AFTER I ARRIVED AT HARVARD IN** August 2000 to begin my work as curator of the Nieman Foundation for Journalism, Tim Golden, an investigative reporter for the *New York Times* in Latin America, phoned me. "Could I find a place in the new Nieman class for a Colombian journalist named Ignacio Gómez?" he asked.

Nacho, as Gómez was known to his friends, had fled his country in late May after a series of death threats and was living in exile in the United States. Golden explained that in Nacho's work as an investigative reporter for *El Espectador* in Bogotá, he had linked paramilitary leader Carlos Castaño and Colombian military forces with the 1997 massacre of 49 people in the village of Mapiripán.

Nacho needs to find something useful to do while he is here, Golden said, and I can think of no better place for his talents than as a Nieman Fellow. "Can you do anything for him?"

I knew that Colombia was a dangerous place to be a journalist, but I had no idea how dangerous until I began to get familiar with Nacho's background. Talking with him by telephone later that week, I sensed the depth of his passion for uncovering the truth no matter how great the risk.

Few of Colombia's terrible secrets had escaped his notice. In almost two decades as an investigative reporter, Gómez had exposed alliances between drug lords and politicians, foreign mercenaries operating in Colombia, corrupt soccer teams, and the role of the Colombian military and paramilitary forces in many notorious massacres.

As I was learning about Nacho during those first days at Walter Lippmann House, I was also discovering that the Nieman curator has the authority to award a fellowship to journalists whose lives are

in danger and who need a safe haven. A few weeks later, Nacho arrived in Cambridge to begin his Nieman Fellowship. It was an enriching experience for him and for the other 24 fellows in the Nieman class of 2001.

The story of Ignacio Gómez is an important starting point in understanding the value of the long relationship between the Nieman Foundation and journalists from Latin America.

My own experience in working with journalists from Latin America began years before I came to Harvard in my work as a newspaper editor. I attended Inter American Press Association meetings. I was involved in working with Latin American journalists in leadership roles in the American Society of Newspaper Editors, Associated Press Managing Editors and the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications. During the 1990s, while I was editor of *The Detroit News*, I taught sessions on newsroom management to editors from Central America through a program administered by Florida International University. From 1997-2000, as executive director of the Freedom Forum's Media Studies Center in New York, I traveled for seminars to Peru, Chile, Argentina and Panama. But none of these experiences brought me the intimate knowledge of the challenges faced by Latin American journalists as did getting to know Nieman Fellows from the region over the course of a year at Harvard.

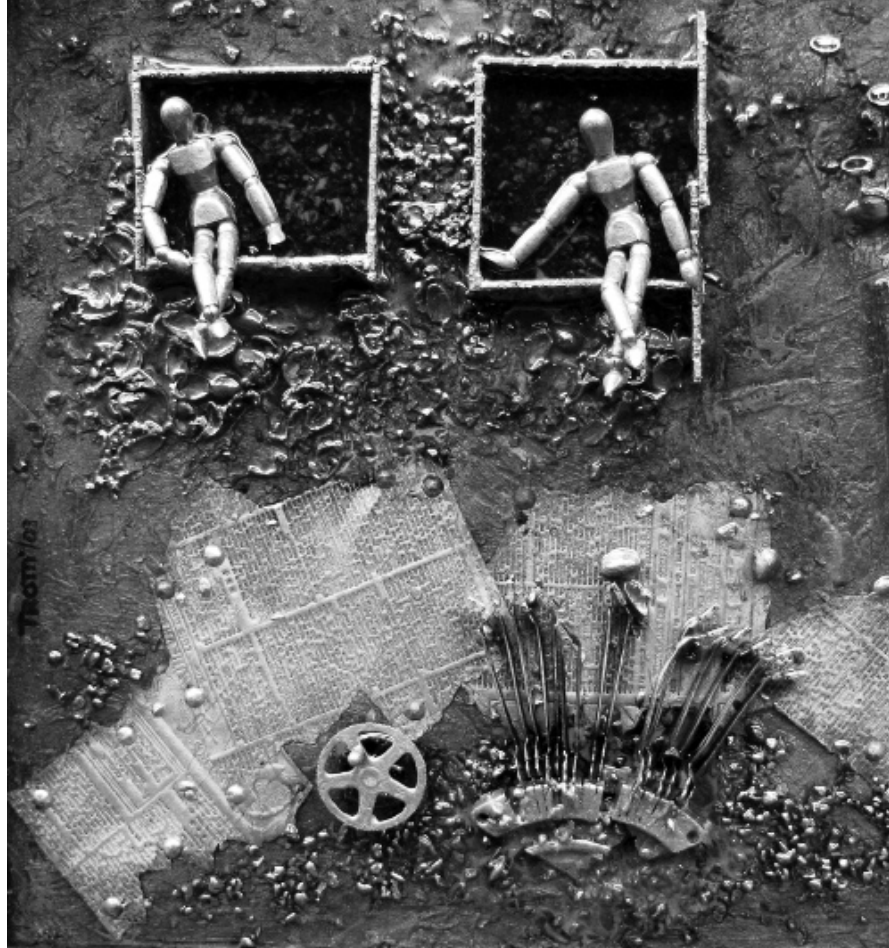
The first Latin American Nieman Fellow was Robert Cox, editor of the *Buenos Aires Herald*, an English-language daily in Argentina, whose criticisms of the military dictatorship that ruled the country from 1976 to 1983 led to his brief detention in 1977.

Continuing threats against his family forced him to leave in 1979. He arrived at

Harvard in the fall of 1980 as the first of 52 Latin American Nieman Fellows. More than a few Latin Americans and Latinos have now enriched the Nieman Foundation with their experiences as journalistic bridges between the United States and Latin America. The Nieman Fellowship program is the oldest and best-known mid-career program for journalists in the world. More than 1,300 journalists from the U.S. and 88 other countries have come to Harvard for a year of learning, exploration and fellowship since it was established in 1938. The estate of Agnes Wahl Nieman, whose husband, Lucius, founded the *Milwaukee Journal*, provided a gift of \$1 million to Harvard in 1937 with a directive to "... promote and elevate the standards of journalism and educate persons deemed especially qualified for journalism." The first international journalists were awarded Nieman Fellowships in 1951 and, in the years since, journalists from around the world have benefitted from the intellectual enrichment of Harvard.

Since 1995, the Latin American fellowships have been funded by grants from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation. Some fellows, like Cox and Gómez, became targets after they exposed government abuses. Many have distinguished themselves as leaders in mainstream news organizations across the continent. Others are known as gifted story tellers. Still others have invested their innovative talents in startup enterprises in the online world. A few have moved into the public sphere, including Juan Manuel Santos, '88, the current president of Colombia.

Such a diverse range of talents and experiences has brought to the Nieman community a rare perspective that has enabled U.S. fellows to see Latin America in a less U.S.-centric way. Latin American fellows have helped us understand that



while they hold to the same high standards as their U.S. colleagues, journalism in Latin America can be dramatically different from that in the United States. They told chilling stories of working in dangerous places where a journalist or an editor does not always have the legal protections that U.S. journalists enjoy.

In Chile, for example, laws give judges, members of congress and other government officials immunity. Alejandra Matus, a Nieman Fellow in 2010, wrote a revealing book about the Chilean judiciary, *The Black Book of Chilean Justice*, which chronicled the “corruption, nepotism and abuses of power” in Chile’s justice system. The entire print run of the book was seized and, in 1999, Matus was charged under the State Security Law by which journalists could be jailed for five years for defaming senior officials. She fled the country until new legislation, introduced in 2001, allowed her to return from exile in the United States and resume her career as a journalist.

Alfredo Corchado, ’09, Mexico City bureau chief for the *Dallas Morning News*, won the 2010 Elijah Parish Lovejoy Award at Colby College in Maine, for his fearless coverage of the drug wars in Mexico.

In his acceptance speech, Corchado noted, “Mexico today is among the most dangerous places to do journalism in the world, right up there with Iraq, Russia and Somalia. This is especially true for those who cover the US-Mexico border, once a frontier for Mexicans seeking new opportunities and new beginnings.”

Corchado said he accepted the award “in the memory of the more than 60 Mexican journalists who have been murdered and dozens more who have disappeared since 2000, more than 30 in the past four years” (see p. 46).

In addition to defending press freedom with their lives, Latin American Nieman Fellows have been at the cutting edge of the digital revolution that is changing the nature of journalism everywhere. Juanita León, ’07, went to New York following her Nieman year as editor of *flypmedia.com*, a multimedia general interest magazine. The magazine did not survive, but Juanita’s experience with this startup convinced her that there is a role for specialized blogs.

She returned to Colombia to set up an investigative political blog called *La Silla Vacía* (The Empty Seat). She leads a staff of seven that directs the work of 60 un-

paid contributors focusing their coverage on how power is exercised in Colombia (see p. 39).

Through his teaching at the University of Texas and his work with the Knight Foundation, Rosental Alves, a member of the Nieman class of 1988 from Brazil, has had a profound influence on journalism in Latin America. In 1991, he created an online, real-time finance news service, the first of its kind in Brazil. In 1994, Alves managed the launching of *Jornal do Brasil*’s online edition, making it the first Brazilian newspaper available on the Internet. At Texas, he created the Knight Center for Journalism in the Americas where he trains journalists in foreign correspondence and press freedom in the hemisphere.

Alma Guillermoprieto, ’05, has reported courageously and written brilliantly about Latin American reality for more than 20 years. She covered the insurrection against Anastasio Somoza in Nicaragua for the *Guardian* and broke the story of the massacre at El Mozote for the *Washington Post*. Her dispatches currently are published in the *New Yorker*, *National Geographic* and *New York Review of Books*. Her most recent book, *Dancing with Cuba*, is a memoir about teaching dance at the Escuela de Danza Moderna in Havana in 1970 that also examines the long history of the Cuban Revolution.

The experience of Hollman Morris forms a kind of bookend to my work with journalists from Latin America during my 11 years as curator of the Nieman Foundation. Hollman, an investigative television reporter from Colombia, was denied a visa by the U.S. government as he prepared to travel to Cambridge to begin his year as a member of the Nieman class of 2011.

During a heartfelt conversation over Skype late last June, Hollman told me the denial was based on accusations by the Colombian government linking him to the leftist guerrilla group FARC. His probing television reports had disclosed abuses by the country’s intelligence agency, angering the Colombian government. Particularly, he said, his travel to southern



Colombia to interview senior FARC leaders for a documentary on kidnappings had raised suspicions.

What a paradox this seemed to be. A courageous journalist whose groundbreaking work had exposed him to persecution by his own government was being turned away by the United States, with its longstanding commitment to press freedom worldwide.

With extraordinary help from the Committee to Protect Journalists, whose mission is to come to the aid of journalists worldwide, and Human Rights Watch, a coalition quickly emerged that would pursue every angle to get this unjust decision reversed. When the news that Hollman had been denied a visa first broke in an AP dispatch from Bogotá, stories, columns and editorials followed. Thoughtful, persuasive letters went to the White House and State Department. Nieman Fellows wrote to express outrage and ask what they could do. I called on members of the Nieman class of 1988 to contact their classmate, Juan Manuel Santos who was about to be inaugurated as president of Colombia.

This collective effort worked. By late July, Hollman, who had taken his family to Spain for security reasons, was asked by the State Department to return to Bogotá where he received his visa.

Several weeks later, fully launched into his Nieman year, he sent me an e-mail noting the “marvelous things” that have happened, “like seeing my kids going by themselves to the park in front the house without bodyguards. We see them playing every day from the window and for the first time we are not afraid that something could happen to them.”

**Bob Giles** will retire as curator at the end of the Harvard school year in June 2011. He was a Nieman Fellow in 1966 and, over a long newspaper career, edited newspapers in Akron, Ohio; Rochester, New York; and Detroit. He became curator in 2000.

# New Journalists for a New World

Fifteen years with Gabriel García Márquez’s Foundation **BY JAIME ABELLO BANFI**

I RECEIVED A SURPRISING PHONE CALL ONE DAY in late 1993, when I was the director of Telecaribe, a public television channel in Barranquilla, Colombia. The caller was none other than Gabriel García Márquez. “Will you invite me to dinner?” he asked me. “Of course, Gabito,” I answered, perplexed, calling him by the nickname used by his relatives and friends from Colombia’s Caribbean coast.

We agreed on a date for dinner—December 28, day of the Holy Innocents in the Catholic calendar, which is comparable to April Fools’ Day in the United States—and I hung up the phone without imagining that a new stage of my life was about to begin. On the appointed evening, I met with García Márquez, his wife, Mercedes, and a small group of mutual friends from Barranquilla in a restaurant well-known for its good cuisine and with a name appropriate for a Nobel Prize winner: The ABC Club, with the acronym standing for Art, Beauty and Culture.

Between whiskies, the celebrated author, then in his mid-sixties, recounted anecdotes about his beginnings as a reporter in Cartagena’s *El Universal*, where his first editor, Clemente Manuel Zabala, corrected his texts with a red pencil. He recalled how he shared both bar sprees and literary pleasures with his intellectual friends when he was a journalist at Barranquilla’s paper, *El Heraldo*. He also expressed his concern about the weighty theories in vogue still today in many communication and journalism schools, and of his fear of interviewers who trusted the mechanical parrot of the cassette recorder more than their own memories. He proclaimed his conviction that reporting is a literary genre, and that

it would be good to have some workshops where veteran journalists could converse with young reporters about the carpentry of the trade. “What can be done?” I asked him. “Think about that,” was the only thing he said to me with the force of a mandate when I left him at the hotel.

Two months later, I ran into him at the Cartagena Film Festival opening. “Aha, and, what have you been thinking?” he asked me like a teacher who demands a homework assignment. “I met with some colleagues and I have some ideas ready,” I answered. “I expect you the day after tomorrow at five in my apartment,” he replied. The next day I went early to Barranquilla to draft a proposal. It was only two pages long, with a description, inspired by his ideas, outlining the institution what we eventually founded and named the Fundación para un Nuevo Periodismo Iberoamericano — FNPI (Foundation for a New Journalism in Ibero-America).

Little by little we began to build a network of supporters for the project, or as Gabo preferred to call them, “the accomplices.” We planned a program of workshops with a group of journalists headed by the Argentine writer Tomás Eloy Martínez, a veteran storyteller and founder of good newspapers that tended to fare badly for non-journalistic reasons. A year later, in April 1995, Mexican journalist and author Alma Guillermoprieto directed our first workshop, on long-form narrative journalism, with a group of ten journalists under the age of 30. Since then (through December, 2010), the FNPI has organized more than 300 workshops and seminars attended by more than 8,000 journalists from every single Latin American country. In fact, the FNPI has



**Gabriel García Márquez (front row, center) and his wife, Mercedes, accompany FNPI teachers and employees during a workshop in 2010.**

become one of the most active journalism training and professional development centers in the world.

There are more than a thousand communication and journalism schools in Latin America. What makes FNPI different? The answer lies in its focus on practical work, experience sharing and professional debate in an informal environment without academic requirements or theoretical pretensions. “Life will take care of deciding who is capable and who isn’t,” as García Márquez put it. With arithmetic simplicity, he argued that an essential factor in the defense of the integrity of a journalist, his or her independence, and at times even his or her life, is good professional training. This training can best be provided in practice-oriented workshops for small groups. In journalism, ethics is inseparable from technique.

From its headquarters in the colonial town of Cartagena, on the same street as the newspaper office where García Márquez learned the reporter’s craft in 1948, the FNPI has broadened its mission to include exchange seminars and debates on subjects relevant to journalism at the local and international level. It also confers the most prestigious and competitive journalism prize in Latin America and Spain, as well as a lifetime achievement award. The Foundation has developed resources for journalists

such as specialized publications, a website, [www.fnpi.org](http://www.fnpi.org), and virtual networks, as well as a range of initiatives to collaborate with and support independent, public-spirited journalism, but its essential focus is still on the practical training workshops for reporters and editors with the vocation and aptitude necessary for researching stories and telling them in a creative manner. Outstanding journalists, writers and photographers from Europe, Latin America and the United States such as Alma Guillermoprieto, Jon Lee Anderson, Sergio Ramírez, María Teresa Ronderos, Francisco Goldman, Susan Meiselas, Stephen Ferry, Mónica González, Rosental Alves, Miguel Ángel Bastenier, Daniel Santoro, are among the master teachers who regularly lend their time for the Foundation’s workshops. A new generation of teachers is emerging of FNPI alumni, like Juanita León (Colombia), Julio Villanueva Chang (Perú), Cristian Alarcón (Chile-Argentina) and Boris Muñoz (Venezuela).

The Foundation is always looking for new ways to collaborate with journalists from all over the world. Over the years the FNPI has built a network with more than fifty like-minded organizations to support the goal of promoting better-informed societies by taking advantage of the digital media to promote investigative journalism and quality news cov-

erage. Subjects that are vital to democracy and development of the countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, such as the electoral process, poverty, social change, environmental issues, business and economics reporting, and drug trafficking, are among the most important areas of effort and interest. For instance, the FNPI seminars have facilitated the exchange of knowledge and experience between reporters covering issues relating to organized crime and citizen safety with economists, anthropologists, sociologists, screenwriters, novelists and bloggers interested in studying the drug phenomenon. They are united around the proposition of seeking new visions and approaches in the treatment of a problem that has so many regional political and social ramifications. In other fields, the Foundation holds an on-line ethics clinic that has responded to more than a thousand specific cases; it is a pioneer in studies on the social responsibility of communications media enterprises in Latin America; and its gathering, “New Chroniclers of the Indies,” has been a platform for highlighting and promoting new authors and magazines devoted to narrative journalism in the region.

In the fifteen years and several months that have passed since the FNPI began to operate, fundamental changes have occurred in the craft, the business and the social function of journalism. Standards and values have changed, traditional media business structures have collapsed, and multiple journalistic experiments have been attempted. At the same time, wireless Internet and technological advancements have generated constant and formidable challenges to the capacity of journalists to identify, and to connect to, the interests of an increasingly fragmented public. It is a panorama that is both exciting and confusing, a context in which the Foundation is supporting innovation, experimentation and new initiatives without forgetting the need for the adaptation and transition of traditional media and journalists.

Some years ago, García Márquez and I were in Monterrey, Mexico, to present

our annual New Journalism Awards. There had been several very intensive workdays, with a seminar on ethics, quality and journalistic enterprise, and it had concluded with a beautiful ceremony for the journalists from seven countries who received awards. There were even nighttime get-aways to enjoy salsa and vallenato, danced with the same flavor and gusto as in Colombia's Caribbean. At the end we got together to talk about the programs of our Foundation. I will never forget the glow in Gabito's eyes when he said, "And to think that all of this was in our imagination!"

***Jaime Abello Banfi** has been the general director and CEO of the Fundación Nuevo Periodismo Iberoamericano (FNPI), since 1995, when he worked on its creation with Gabriel García Márquez. A lawyer by training, he has nonetheless devoted his professional life to the media, where he seeks to protect and foster independence, creativity and freedom of information.*

*Margery Sorock translated this article.*

"Those who come to the Foundation are brought there from every corner of Latin America, and every social niche. They range from green cub reporters to seasoned veterans well into their careers. There are those who are self-taught and poor and from obscure provincial newspapers, and others who are urban sophisticates, who have had the advantages of top-notch educations, world travel and good incomes. Some of them are already media stars, household names in their countries. But in Cartagena they are equals, and sit shoulder to shoulder as students. What brings them there is their desire to learn, to improve their skills at communicating their diverse realities, and, no doubt, the common hope that some of Gabo's magic might rub off on them."

—JON LEE ANDERSON, THE NEW YORKER

# Journalism Training

From Lapdogs to Watchdogs **BY ROSENAL ALVES**

**WHEN I WAS A YOUNG BRAZILIAN JOURNALIST** in Rio de Janeiro in the early 1970s, I answered the phone in the newsroom several times to hear an ominous voice announcing that he was a federal police agent calling to read out a notice. It was a censorship notification that invariably would start with the words: "By superior order, it is prohibited the publication of..." During the 1970s, military dictatorships that muzzled the press ruled in almost all Latin American countries. As journalists, we would try to test the limits of those regimes as much as possible. But by and large we had no ways to disobey censorship. Censorship was the main problem for us, and went along with permanent and very real threats of becoming a political prisoner, which happened to many colleagues.

In the last quarter of the 20th century, however, an unprecedented wave of democracy swept across the hemisphere. As the new century arrived, elected governments became the rule rather than the exception in Latin America. Journalists enjoyed levels of freedom of expression that had only been seen in their countries during rare and brief intervals between dictatorships or coups d'état. Suddenly, journalists who had fought for democracy were dealing with elected governments instead of the old dictatorships or authoritarian regimes. The challenges of dealing with elected governments were different, more sophisticated and complex in many aspects, despite the new levels of freedom. Throughout the years, since that wave of democratization, many reporters and editors felt that they were not well prepared for their new role as watchdogs in a more open, democratic environment. They needed training to improve skills to be more effective at their jobs. Later, the huge impact of the Digital Revolution on the media and on

society at large made this necessity for training even greater.

By the turn of the century, I had already spent a few years as a journalism professor at the University of Texas at Austin and had discovered this great appetite for training during frequent trips to Latin America to teach seminars and workshops. My own experience as a Brazilian journalist, as well as those trips to other countries, inspired me to dream of the creation of a special program to offer training to journalists in Latin America and the Caribbean. My dream, however, went beyond the traditional hit-and-run workshops of a couple of days that are typical of media assistance programs for developing countries. Instead, I wanted to combine training with help for journalists to create their own, local, independent and self-sustainable organizations with their own permanent professional development programs.

I was lucky to find a way to make that dream come true. Thanks to a generous grant from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, we launched the Knight Center for Journalism in the Americas at the University of Texas at Austin in June 2002. Since then, the Knight Center has reached thousands of journalists in all Latin American countries and virtually all islands in the Caribbean, with on-the-ground and online professional training workshops, seminars and courses. In early 2011, our distance learning program, which offers four- to six-week courses, passed the milestone of 5,000 journalists trained entirely online or in programs that combined online and in-person workshops.

In addition to providing training, we have successfully helped journalists to create organizations that are different from labor unions or traditional associations and much more effective



in focusing on permanent training and professional development of reporters and editors. Some of our partner organizations were created from scratch, with some help from us, but thanks mainly to the effort of the local journalists themselves, usually some of the most active and dedicated reporters and editors in their countries.

In 2002, in the wake of the assassination of investigative reporter Tim Lopes in Rio de Janeiro, we helped create the Brazilian Association of Investigative Journalism (Associação Brasileira de Jornalismo Investigativo, or ABRAJI). Modeled after the Investigative Reporters and Editors (IRE) of the United States, ABRAJI soon became one of the most important organizations of journalists in Brazil. Its annual congress paralleled the IRE's in the number of participants and variety of sessions and topics, and ABRAJI became a model for other organizations in the continent.

The Knight Center also helped to create the Center for Journalism and Public Ethics (CEPET) in Mexico, the Argentine Journalism Forum (FOPEA), the Peruvian Network of Provincial Journalists, the Paraguayan Journalists' Forum (FOPEP), GuateDigital (a network of radio journalists in Guatemala) and the Newsroom Council (Consejo de Redacción, CdR) in Colombia. In Chile, Ecuador and the Dominican Republic, as well as a few other countries, there are ongoing efforts to establish networks or organizations of journalists.

The number one request for training throughout Latin America has been in investigative journalism. Reporters and editors want to learn how to uncover stories that governments and corporations want to hide. They know that those powers work in increasingly sophisticated ways, with the help of public relations experts, to control the flow of information. Sometimes, it is clearly an unfair game, with journalists who have received very little, if any, training on one side, and the powerful sources helped by professional marketers on the other side.

The very concept of investigative journalism seems to encapsulate the goals of Latin American journalists to move forward in the ongoing democratization processes in their countries. How to move from lapdog journalism to watchdog journalism? In Latin American countries with incipient democracies and little tradition of a free press, this is the essential question for journalists who want to aggressively pursue their role in the checks and balances of a democratic society.

It is amazing what just a little bit of training can do. In 2003, for example, we hosted the first "training of trainers" workshop on Computer-Assisted Reporting (CAR) in São Paulo, with 22 journalists coming from 17 states in Brazil. All of them had promised to return to their newsrooms and teach what they had just learned from two of the best trainers of the American IRE, Brant Houston (now a professor at the University of Illinois) and Ron Nixon (now a *New York Times* investigative reporter). Thus, when Marcelo Moreira and Gabriela Mafort, from Globo TV in Rio de Janeiro, went back to their newsroom, they started having meetings with their colleagues explaining how to use CAR techniques. That same week, the government of Rio de Janeiro issued its usual press release saying that violence was on the decline in Rio, highlighting some figures that supposedly proved their findings. The Globo team decided to request the raw data and apply the CAR techniques they had just learned, of cross-checking the figures. Their effort yielded the opposite conclusion: in fact, violence was on the rise. All the other newsrooms in Rio were shocked and had to change their stories when Globo's evening news came out.

More and more journalists in Latin America now know that interviewing the data before interviewing people makes their investigations stronger. Simple skills like knowing how to import a spreadsheet from the Web and cross-check data have become extremely powerful tools in the region, especially after

administrations started to follow the fashionable tendency of e-government, publishing a lot of raw data on the Internet. The data does not mean a lot for an untrained journalist, but it can be revealing and relevant to a journalist who is well-trained and versed in CAR basic techniques.

Besides investigative journalism, Latin American journalists also are eager for training in the use of the Internet and other digital technologies. This is obviously a universal demand, but it is important to note that Latin America has a fast growing Internet market, with one of the highest levels of activity in social media, for example. Latin Americans in general, and Brazilians in particular, seem to be more active in social networks than Americans or Europeans. Journalists are trying their best to understand this phenomenon and adapt to the new media ecosystem that is rapidly emerging.

The Knight Center has broken its own records for applications received from Latin American journalists every time it offers courses such as "How to Write for the Web," "Digital Media Project Development," "Digital Tools for Investigative Journalism," and "Hyperlocal Journalism on the Web." These courses are not only about the Web, but they are also taught entirely on the Web, on a distance-learning platform that the center has developed using an open-source course management system called Moodle. The online courses proved to be ideal to teach journalists in Latin America, since they offer flexibility in terms of time. Students can log on to courses at any time, easily adapting the pace of their studies to their busy work schedule. We have enrolled more than 5,000 journalists from all over the hemisphere in almost 100 courses taught in English, Portuguese and Spanish by fellow journalists and scholars from a variety of countries.

An interesting chemistry arises when journalists from different countries in Latin America are united by their interest in training. The bond of community formation can last and generate positive

results and interesting collaborative projects. For example, the Consejo de Redacción (CdR), one of the youngest but most dynamic and creative journalists' organizations in Latin America, used the Knight Center's distance learning platform to engage 89 journalists from 11 Latin American countries in an online training program that converged into a collective investigation of carbon emissions trading in the countries of the region.

The CdR-led initiative, which involves several similar organizations of journalists from all over the hemisphere, symbolizes a new phase in the history of journalism in Latin America. There are still many political challenges, a lot of pressure from governments that don't understand the watchdog role of journalists and a long way to go in the improvement of the quality of journalism. The 21st century journalists of Latin America need more training to play the important role that corresponds to them in the young democracies of their countries. They also need more training, as do journalists from all over the world, to face the huge challenges of the Digital Revolution that is transforming the media ecosystem so profoundly. But it is a much different environment from the one in which those federal police agents would call my newsroom in Rio de Janeiro to dictate a censorship notice.

**Rosental Alves** is the director and founder of the Knight Center for Journalism in the Americas at the University of Texas at Austin. He began his academic career in the United States after 27 years as a professional journalist, including seven years as a journalism professor in Brazil. He moved to Austin from Rio de Janeiro, where he was the managing editor and member of the board of directors of *Jornal do Brasil*. He was the first Brazilian awarded a Nieman Fellowship (1987-88) at Harvard University.

# Covering the Region

## Fewer Foreign Correspondents **BY JOSH FRIEDMAN**

**JONATHAN KANDELL, A YOUNG REPORTER JUST** a few years out of Columbia Journalism School, won the newspaperman's lottery in 1972. *The New York Times* sent him to South America and, for the next five years, he lived in great style as a foreign correspondent based first in Buenos Aires, then Rio de Janeiro.

These were exciting times to cover South America—military coups, CIA intrigue, political turmoil, murderous regimes quick to jail or even kill journalists. And in those days, the *Times* correspondent was an important, sometimes, singular, source of what was happening. He (most were men) lived almost as well as an ambassador and had almost as much access. Kandell flew first class. He had an enormous expense account and a team of stringers around the continent to help him. In each of his two posts, he belonged to a press community of more than a dozen permanent U.S. newspaper, newsmagazine, wire service and network TV correspondents.

Now that style of life is gone. Yes, there are still three *New York Times* bureaus in Latin America—but their reporters survive on much thinner budgets. In fact, as of last year, only a handful of U.S. newspaper correspondents were left in Latin America, among the few survivors as American newspapers are outsourcing coverage of the world to others.

But that's only half the picture. Despite the pullback, a greater variety of news sources and perspectives is available to American readers. Most news of Latin America now reaches the United States by Internet—and much of it is produced by Latin Americans reporting on their home countries. And many aren't even traditional journalists—but bloggers, financial analysts and scholars.

For some like Kandell, now a successful freelance magazine writer and author

who needs reliable information about the region to ply his craft, this is good. He can start his day in New York by reading that morning's leading Latin American newspapers like Brazil's *Folha do São Paulo*, Chile's *Mercurio* and Argentina's *La Nación*. He receives a constant flow of news about the day's events over the web from well-sourced analysts and bloggers.

"Frankly, I think the coverage is much better because of the web," says Kandell, "There's lot of very good stuff out there—not just the *New York Times*. And a lot is more trustworthy."

But if you still want to see the world through U.S. eyes, there is a big problem, says Daniel Butler, whose Washington staff provides intelligence briefings based on open (public) sources.

In a speech at the National Press Club last June, Butler, the assistant deputy director for open source in the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, said U.S. intelligence analysts are losing "an important source of information" because "the quantity, breadth, depth, content and quality" of news from U.S. journalists posted abroad was declining. He blamed decisions by many traditional news organizations to cut back the number of their correspondents overseas.

The decline is indisputable. In the 1980s and 1990s, nearly a score of American newspapers had foreign bureaus all over Latin America. Among the best:

- The *Miami Herald* had four bureaus in Latin America—Managua, Bogotá, Rio, Mexico City.
- The *Boston Globe* had bureaus in Bogotá, Colombia, and Mexico City, two of six bureaus around the world.
- *Newsday* had a bureau in Mexico City, one of six bureaus around the world.
- Cox Newspapers had a bureau in Mexico City.
- The *San Jose Mercury* had a bureau in Mexico.
- The *Baltimore Sun* had a bureau in Rio de Janeiro in the 1970's, one of eight bureaus



Bill Gentile is typical of the scores of U.S. journalists who used to cover the Americas for print outlets that have now disappeared or retreated from coverage of the region by eliminating or reducing the number of correspondents. Gentile, who first worked in Nicaragua reporting on the 1979 Sandinista Revolution for United Press International (UPI), is shown here covering the 1980s Contra War for *Newsweek* in the northern mountains of Nicaragua. Now a journalism professor at American University, Gentile is hosting “Backpack Documentary Expedition: Nicaragua,” a 10-day immersion in the process of documentary filmmaking. Participants will follow U.S. volunteers for Bridges to Community to learn the essence of documentary—using media to transform the world. See <http://www.billgentile.com/expedition.php>.

around the world.

- The Chicago Tribune Company had a South American bureau and had opened a Havana bureau in 2001.

Now none of the above newspapers have bureaus in Latin America—or anywhere else in the world.

- Only a few of the largest U.S. papers still deploy reporters to the region—and minimally at that. As of last year:

- The *Washington Post* had only one full-time Latin American bureau—in Mexico City. Its Rio bureau had been vacant for a year with no likelihood it would be reactivated. The *Post* downgraded its Bogotá bureau from full to half time a few years ago and now shares a Bogotá correspondent with National Public Radio.

- The *Los Angeles Times* has only a Mexico City bureau. Its former full-time Bogotá bureau chief has been put on a stringer contract.

- The *New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal* each have three bureaus—The *Times* in Caracas, Rio, and Mexico City and the *Journal* in São Paulo, Mexico City and Rio.

This is a worldwide phenomenon. In very rough numbers, the corps of U.S. newspaper foreign correspondents

around the world has dropped by close to a third in less than a decade, according to a count taken primarily last July by the *American Journalism Review*. That tally counted 234 full-time staff members plus contract writers (including one vacancy) employed by 10 newspapers and one chain. In a 2003 census, the *AJR* counted 307 full-time correspondents and those pending assignment—and that count did not include contract writers.

Much of this is due to media concentration gone awry—added to a perfect storm of long-term technological change and more recent financial collapse. Huge media companies went into debt in the boom time of the 1990s and early 2000s to buy up newspapers, but then could not borrow more to keep going when the economy collapsed.

Rick Edmunds of the Poynter Institute reported last year that strapped for money, panicked newspapers had spent \$1.6 billion less on news annually in the previous three years. And that comes on top of several years of budget pressure caused by falling readership.

Last year, the American Society of News Editors reported that newspa-

pers had cut more than a quarter of their full-time staffers in the past nine years—13,500 staff cuts since 2007, 5,200 jobs cut just in 2009.

Foreign bureaus are the first and easiest candidates for cost-cutting, since maintaining a foreign bureau costs between a quarter and half a million dollars a year. The effect on U.S. foreign coverage is even greater when you recognize that the cuts disproportionately affect higher paid, more experienced journalists with specialized knowledge of regions like Latin America.

The shrinking process resembled a feeding frenzy.

The Tribune Company, now in bankruptcy, swallowed up the *Los Angeles Times*, *Newsday* and the *Baltimore Sun* and, with its own *Tribune* foreign staff, cut foreign bureaus mercilessly.

The McClatchy Company swallowed up the Knight Ridder newspaper chain, then had to cut back, eliminating its Rio bureau two years ago and its Caracas bureau the year before, leaving only one bureau in Mexico City. The former jewel in Knight-Ridder's Latin American coverage, the *Miami Herald*, is left only with



a Miami-based parachuting reporter to cover all of South America.

The *St. Petersburg Times*, one of the South's highest quality newspapers, eliminated its Latin American correspondent position two years ago.

Of course Associated Press and Bloomberg News still have extensive coverage around the world, including Latin America. Bloomberg alone now has 11 Latin American bureaus.

U.S. TV networks are mostly gone from Latin America with only occasional representation in Havana and Mexico City, although NBC claims to have one Latin American bureau and ABC three.

The only serious U.S. cable TV attempt to cover Latin America is CNN, with six bureaus in Latin America, five just in South America—Bogotá, Buenos Aires, Caracas, Mexico City, Havana, Santiago and São Paulo.

Ironically the most extensive English-language broadcast news about Latin America is coming from foreign countries. Al Jazeera has bureaus in Bogotá, Buenos Aires, Caracas, Mexico City and São Paulo. And BBC has full-time foreign correspondents in São Paulo, Buenos Aires, Mexico City and Havana. In fact, according to a recent survey by Nielsen Media Research, many viewers in Washington who want international coverage in English often turn to BBC, Russia Today, Al Jazeera, Deutsche Welle, France 24, Euronews, and China Central Television.

For years, technological change has been cutting into newspaper readership and ad revenue. Short-term, the assault has been economic. Lower consumption has eaten into ads for real estate, autos, jobs appliances and department stores.

The picture is very bleak, according to "2010 State of the Media" a comprehensive report by the Project for Excellence in Journalism. According to data in the report:

- Classified income fell 70 percent from \$19.6 billion to \$6 billion in the last three years. Ad revenue in general fell by 23 percent in 2007 and 2008, fell another 26 percent in 2009.
- Display ad rates started falling in mid-2007

because fewer people are buying and reading newspapers.

- Newspaper circulation has been dropping for years and the downward curve is getting steeper. It fell 10.6 daily and 7.1 percent Sunday from 2008 to 2009. The only major paper not to lose circulation was the *Wall Street Journal*, which had a tiny 0.6 percent rise. Readership is going down for all age groups, although readers 18 to 34 had the lowest levels. Just a little more than one-quarter of them said they had read a daily paper the day before, according to Scarborough Research. The decline is on all education levels.

- You may think that this decline is ameliorated because younger people are replacing daily newspaper reading with reading newspaper sites on the web. Yes, unique visitors of newspaper sites were up 14 percent from the third quarter of 2008 to the third quarter of 2009—to 74 million readers, according to Nielsen Online. But the average visitor spent only about a half hour a month looking at a newspaper site.

On the supply side, however, all is not negative. Technology is neither good nor bad. It is what it is and many good new sources are springing up to fill the vacuum left as traditional U.S. newspaper correspondents vanish from Latin America.

Young U.S. journalists, who would have had to spend years working their way up to a foreign posting, can become instant free-lance foreign correspondents. With a few thousand dollars worth of lightweight video and audio equipment and a laptop, they can function quite cheaply on their own.

New digital media like GlobalPost offer the prospect of a more secure free-lance role. Just two years old, GlobalPost employs more than 70 correspondents in more than 50 countries—including Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Mexico, Bolivia, Canada, Costa Rica and Venezuela. Major U.S. media like CBS have recently signed up to buy some of their coverage.

Then there is the model of non-profit organizations sponsoring journalists for one-time reporting projects in Latin America. Once a way for newspaper reporters with a domestic beat to spend a

few months overseas, the organizations are becoming a good resource for freelancers abroad.

The International Reporting Project, for example, gives out 32 reporting fellowships each year. It has sent 300 journalists to report in more than 85 countries. The Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting has a similar model.

Blogs are increasing throughout Latin America. American readers who know Spanish or Portuguese can follow them and read daily newspapers from throughout the continent. And much is in English. Here is just a taste:

- Non-profits like the Americas Society and the Council of the Americas aggregate news of the Americas at <http://www.as-coa.org>. The Inter-American Dialogue publishes a daily newsletter called the Latin American Advisor. Press can get a free subscription through the [dialogue.org](http://dialogue.org)
- Many journalists turn to Colombia's *Semana*. com at <http://www.semana.com/Home.aspx> and *El Tiempo* at <http://www.eltiempo.com/>, Spain's *El País* at <http://www.elpais.com/global/>, Nicaragua's *Confidencial* at <http://www.confidencial.com.ni/>, and <http://www.bbc.co.uk/mundo>, to name just a few. During the Haiti earthquake, the Haitian diaspora was glued to <http://www.signalfmhaiti.com/>.
- And if there is any doubt about the quality of these sources, please check out El Salvador's *El Faro* <http://elfaro.net/> (see p. 41). Last year, its young editor, Carlos Dada, published a beautifully written long-form investigation that revealed the likely assassin of Msgr. Oscar Romero on the 30th anniversary of his murder. This was journalism of the highest order.

**Josh Friedman** is the director of the Maria Moors Cabot Prizes at Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism. He is the recipient of numerous journalism awards including the 1985 Pulitzer Prize for International Reporting. He did most of his newspaper reporting at *Newsday* and the *Philadelphia Inquirer* and was editor of the *Soho News*. Long-time board member and former chair of the Committee to Protect Journalists, he served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Costa Rica from 1964 to 1966.

# What's New in Latin American Journalism

An Overview **BY GRACIELA MOCHKOFKY**

**FROM DEEP DISAPPOINTMENT TO EXCITING NEW** times: if that were a good title, it would be the title of this story.

Just three years ago, after spending 17 years as a political correspondent and columnist with major Buenos Aires newspapers, I took a break from Argentina's media. Journalism had been my life, but like so many reporters of my generation, who had experienced the good days of journalism, I grew disenchanted and sad about what it had become.

In Argentina, there was little talk about the death of newspapers. We did not live the widespread disaster of the United States press, with papers closing down, thousands of reporters being laid off and the traditional business model for print journalism in agony. But my generation was leaving the newsroom, looking to the future with uncertainty—when not hunting for a different profession altogether.

Today, the landscape has changed dramatically. A new wave of independent, forward-thinking and critical journalism is spreading throughout the continent. This journalism is not in the hands of young, new reporters: it is the experienced journalists of my generation shaping a new model of journalism nurtured by his and her (our!) frustration with Latin America's mainstream media.

## COMMON GROUND

There is of course no such thing as Latin American journalism. Our countries and experiences are different, but most of us share some common problems.

To different degrees and at varying speeds, the worldwide crisis of the traditional media—decrease of paper readership, migration to digital platforms, changes in the information paradigm, lack



of a new business model—is beginning to hit most Latin American countries.

Throughout the continent, readers (and often even the reporters) ignore who actually owns media companies. In many cases, the particular interests of owners allow for little editorial independence; political ties hide behind a façade of political independence.

We also share, in very general terms, low salaries, corruption in the newsroom, low professional standards and unfair internal promotion rules, which bring to the top the bureaucrat and the obedient individual—ready to censor their subordinates—instead of the hard working, talented reporter.

For the most part, content production is in the hands of large media companies; the independent bloggers, the high-quality information website, are few and far between. In part, the lack of growth until recently in this area comes from the fact that Internet connectivity is deeply uneven throughout the continent.

Local funding for independent media outlets is very hard to come by. The local capitalist is still fond of the traditional media and their traditional game. But we also have common advantages.

We share the great, unique advantage of a continental language, Spanish (with, of course, the exception of Brazil and Portuguese, which is a world of its own).

We are the fastest growing region in the world in Internet connectivity (23 percent in 2009, though the penetration rates are still relatively low). This creates a special and emerging opportunity for the development of new media outlets: costs are relatively low, structures small, and one of the great historical impediments for building a regional presence—the financial and many practical problems of continental distribution—has disappeared.

The growing Internet market is attracting the interest of European, Arab and Chinese companies and organizations—which goes hand in hand with the impressive new wave of economic interest in the region. One of the major funders for new digital outlets in the re-

gion is U.S. philanthropist George Soros' Open Society Foundation, which up until three years ago had shown almost no interest in Latin America.

Finally, we are in the presence of a generation of experienced reporters with entrepreneurial spirit and a strong self-awareness of being the avant-garde of a journalistic revolution.

#### THE NEW WAVE

On March 2010, my husband and colleague Gabriel Pasquini and I launched *el puercoespín*, a digital magazine and our own personal experiment with new media. As part of our exploration of new ways of narrating the world and forecasting the journalisms of the future, we started drawing a narrative map of Latin America's new media experiences.

In Colombia, we found *La Silla Vacía*, founded by our friend Juanita León, who has the skills and talent of a solid editor and the determination and strength of a business entrepreneur. Her website, which has been online for almost two years now, is an independent attempt to cover the powerful in Colombia—in León's own words, the site deals with "how power is exercised"—in ways the traditional media never have in her country. It is a successful enterprise, hosting more than sixty political blogs and with an active participation from a growing audience.

In El Salvador, we found *El Faro*, the most unlikely digital publication. *El Faro* is the brainchild of Carlos Dada, who in 1998 had the crazy idea of launching an Internet publication in a country emerging from a cruel civil war and with almost no Internet connections—he did it out of lack of funds more than of clairvoyance about the future of journalism. *El Faro* specializes in hardcore investigative journalism and long narrative form, carried out under very difficult circumstances. The digital publication has gained prestige and admiration throughout the continent.

In Perú, we found *IDL-Reporteros*, where veteran Gustavo Gorriti leads a small group of young reporters in a

watchdog journalism project. They have exposed cases of corruption and abuse of power with a degree of independence and freedom almost impossible to find today in the country's established media. Gorriti's training requirements for his young reporters include taking classes of Krav Maga, the Israeli hand-to-hand combat technique.

In Chile, we found very diverse experiences, from Mónica González' investigative non-profit organization CIPER for high-quality watchdog journalism, to the satirical magazine *The Clinic*, to a network of a dozen citizen journalism dailies.

In Mexico, we found *NuestraAparente Rendición*, a collective blog managed by writer Lolita Bosch under the premise that only civil society can save Mexico from total disaster. It posts stories, personal testimony, literature and art about the violence, in a collective effort to find a way out of the violence.

In Argentina, we found *chequeado.com*, a local version of the U.S. site *FactCheck* and a reaction against the political polarization of the country's media.

This is an incomplete map and a work in progress. There are more websites, blogs, newspapers and magazines already changing journalism in our countries, and we expect to see many more emerge in 2011.

**Graciela Mochkofsky**, a 2009 Nieman fellow at Harvard, is the co-founder and editor of digital magazine *el puercoespín* ([www.elpuercoespín.com.ar](http://www.elpuercoespín.com.ar)). She is the author of four nonfiction books, among them *Timerman. El periodista que quiso ser parte del poder (1923-1999), a biography of legendary Argentine journalist Jacobo Timerman* (Ed. Sudamericana, 2003). Her fifth nonfiction book, about press and politics in Argentina, is coming out in 2011. She lives in Buenos Aires.

More on New Voices can be found in the section by the same name on pages 31-44 of this magazine.





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# UNDER ATTACK

Despite formal democracy in much of the region, the press in Latin America is often the subject of attacks, including murder, censorship, threats and insults, as well as restrictive press laws. Challenges can come from both governments and extralegal groups.

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# Indirect Censorship

Journalism in a Difficult Context **BY RICARDO TROTTI**

**TO TALK ABOUT PRESS FREEDOM, IT'S NECESSARY** to talk about democracy. Both are intimately related. The quality of the one affects the other. Latin America is not immune from this equation, since both press freedom and democracy exist in a context with persistent structural and historic problems.

In the last twenty years, the region has made great strides in achieving formal democracy, but its institutions are very weak. In many cases, states have not been able to take care of their citizens' basic necessities. In many countries, all three branches of government have extremely low rates of credibility. Even more worrisome is that the vital signs of democracy are weakening in certain areas: for example, in the lack of independence among the three branches of government, transparency in elections and citizen participation, as well as of respect for institutions, including the press. Statistics published by Freedom House at the beginning of 2011 indicate that democracy has suffered setbacks in 25 countries throughout the world, including three in Latin America: Haiti, Mexico and Venezuela.

The lack of an independent judicial branch, which is used as a political instrument of power in countries like Bolivia, Nicaragua and Venezuela, is notable. In addition, in many governments in the region, power is concentrated in the executive branch and opposition political parties are very weak.

Eight out of every ten people in Latin America feel inadequately protected by their government. In many cities, they live in a permanent climate of insecurity. Increase in drug trafficking, organized crime, juvenile gangs, and in many cases, corruption within the government itself—especially within the police force, as in Guatemala, Hon-

duras and Mexico—are all part of the problem. A recent report by the Chilean polling firm Latinobarómetro indicates that 27% of the murders in the world take place in Latin America, which has only 8% of the world's population. One out of every three Latin Americans (200 million) has been the victims of some kind of crime.

With a few exceptions like Chile, Costa Rica and Uruguay, Latin America leads the lists of governmental corruption in the world and corruption is tending to increase. Multinational companies—IBM in Argentina, Chevron in Ecuador and Chiquita in Central America—also contribute to this phenomenon.

Despite some advances in literacy in countries such as Cuba, Brazil and Venezuela, most education systems do not prepare the work force to compete in a globalized world, leading to high unemployment. According to the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations, there are 53 million undernourished people in Latin America. Latin Americans with university education tend to emigrate, causing a brain drain.

## A DIFFICULT CONTEXT

To practice journalism in this context is not easy. The press frequently suffers the consequences of its own lack of professionalism and independence and of the absence or weakness of other institutions such as political parties. Denunciations and investigations provoke retaliatory measures from governments, as well as from the power elite, organized crime and other extralegal groups.

Press laws frequently attempt to control journalistic content. Independent journalists have been arbitrarily jailed in Cuba. However, there are many other forms of control that affect the free practice of journalism. Indirect censorship—

attacks on the media, including kidnappings, threats and murders—is now more prevalent than direct censorship against the press—23 journalists were murdered in the region in 2010. Both direct and indirect censorship are intended to provoke self-censorship in which the media and journalists silence themselves because of fear of the consequences.

## SMEAR CAMPAIGNS

Many governments claim the existence of complete freedom of the press in their countries. For example, Argentine president Cristina de Kirchner recently asserted in a political rally that everyone could say anything they wanted in that country.

But that is only a half-truth. Press freedom involves not only the right to express oneself, but also the right not to be harassed or persecuted for that expression. And this is not the case in Argentina today, nor in Venezuela, Nicaragua, Ecuador or Bolivia, whose governments discriminate and retaliate systematically against independent media and journalists who are critical in their reporting.

Governments frequently conduct systematic smear campaigns to discredit journalists and the media. Hugo Chávez has accused journalists of promoting coups; Rafael Correa claims the Ecuadoran media advocate in favor of the bourgeoisie; Evo Morales characterizes the media as servants of imperialism.

Measures against the press are sometimes crude and obvious, such as shutting down media in Venezuela, accusing an Ecuadoran journalist of being a terrorist when he kicked a teargas grenade in the direction of the president or accusing—without any evidence—the executives of the Argentine newspapers *Clarín* and *La Nación* of crimes against humanity for having purchased a paper



mill during the dictatorship. But sometimes the measures are much more subtle, aimed at undermining the economic base of the media.

#### ECONOMIC COERCION

Economic pressure on the media comes in many forms, including discrimination in the placement of official advertising or in granting licenses to operate radio and television stations; heavy or unfair taxation; and creating obstacles that affect the import of supplies and the distribution of news.

Discriminatory placement of official advertising to reward the compliant press and to punish the independent and critical press continues to be the most frequent form of corruption and influence, one that is very difficult to combat. Official advertising in Latin America is often a large part of a newspaper's revenue, yet governments continue to be reluctant to enact norms of transparency that would oblige them to distribute advertising in a fair manner, using technical criteria.

In Argentina, which has a history of governments using this mechanism of pressure, the newspaper *La Nación* of Buenos Aires revealed that the execu-

tive branch spent \$27 million in public funds on official advertising, of which 67.5% was allotted to Channel 9, property of a businessman closely allied with the government, even though other channels have larger audiences and higher ratings.

In Nicaragua, several small regional newspapers and radio stations had to shut their doors in 2010 because of the withdrawal of official advertising in retaliation for failing to editorially "benefit" the government of Daniel Ortega.

In both Argentina and Nicaragua, unions are politically manipulated to take action against the media. In both Buenos Aires and Managua, unions—which share common ideologies with the respective governments—frequently block the distribution channels of local newspapers.

In other countries, governments adopt other mechanisms of economic coercion. The implementation of special taxes and holding up newspaper print and other imported materials in customs were characteristic measures of the former governments of Argentine president Juan Domingo Perón and the PRI in Mexico.

#### THE STATE AS "INFORMER"

In Argentina, Nicaragua, Ecuador and Venezuela, the economic stranglehold of the media tends to have shameful extortionist intentions. Governments, their officials or strawmen lie in wait to buy private media in trouble or simply set up new private media with public funds, not to serve as public media (like public broadcasting) but to work in their own self-interest.

The friends of "Kirchnerism" in Argentina eagerly await the Audiovisual Communication Services Act in which Article 161 obliges businesses to divest themselves of media in less than a year, although the government has already been buying up media across the country in order to maintain a well-oiled propaganda machine in the wake of this year's October elections.

In Nicaragua, President Daniel Ortega became the sole private owner of Channels 4 and 5 and radio stations *Ya* and *Sandino* with public funds, according to charges of corruption made against him. President Chávez in Venezuela expropriated RCTV in 2007, as well as five other cable channels and 34 radio stations. Meanwhile, he created





238 radio stations, 28 television stations, 340 print media, more than 125 sites for propaganda on the Internet, and a multimedia international news agency.

Ecuador's president Rafael Correa confiscated television channels and a newspaper, and used public funds to create the newspaper *Periódico Popular*, which strategically competes against the other print media with the pretext that all the media lie—except for the government press. In Bolivia, President Evo Morales created a network of communitarian radios and television, and purchased print media with funds provided by the Venezuelan government—media that he uses for personal interests.

#### PRESS LAWS

The methods of indirect censorship are implicit and permitted in laws adopted in Venezuela and Argentina. The approval of similar measures is expected in Ecuador this year, and likely forthcoming in Bolivia and Brazil.

Before the end of 2010, the Venezuelan government hastened to approve statutes restricting media, including the Internet and social media such as Twitter and Facebook, through reforms to

the Law on Social Responsibility and the Telecommunications Law.

The new norms oblige Internet providers to restrict the diffusion of information and access to websites that criticize the government or promote public disorder or acts against national security.

These attacks are not new. The Chávez government previously attempted to close Globovisión, the only television station with a critical voice, and it has now appropriated 20% of the station ownership. The new norms establish more restrictive criteria for property ownership and operation that make it almost impossible for the station president, Guillermo Zuloaga, who is seeking political asylum in the United States, to continue as the owner.

In Ecuador, debate continues about the proposed Law of Communication, which would create a regulatory council that could meddle with television, radio and print media contents. In January of this year, Rafael Correa proposed a referendum in which two of the ten questions related to the media. In particular, he set forth the need for the state to limit media ownership and its contents when these affect the generally accepted moral code.

#### LESS DEMOCRACY, MORE ATTACKS

In former times—as well as now—it has been shown that the degree of a government's authoritarianism is directly proportional the time it spends on controlling the press. And the more time that is spent in this effort, the more stubborn and vengeful the government becomes against journalism.

Attacks on press freedom in Latin America will continue unless democracy and the institutional climate improve. The two, as I said at the beginning of this article, are inseparable. And if democracy deteriorates, attacks against the press will continue to multiply.

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*He is also a self-taught artist whose illustrations grace the cover of this magazine as well as throughout this issue (see pages 2, 7, 15, 17, 19, 20, 23, 25, 29, 30, and inside back cover).*

# Freedom of Expression in Latin America

## The Inter-American Human Rights System

BY CATALINA BOTERO MARINO AND MICHAEL J. CAMILLERI

IN JUNE 1997, CHILE'S SUPREME COURT UPHELD a ban on the film "The Last Temptation of Christ," based on a Pinochet-era provision of the country's constitution. Four years later, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights heard a challenge to this ban and issued a very different decision. The hemisphere's highest human rights tribunal found that in censoring the film Chile had violated its international obligation to respect freedom of thought and expression. It ordered Chile not just to allow "The Last Temptation of Christ" to be screened, but also to modify its constitution so that such censorship would not be repeated in the future.

As the Inter-American Court's first freedom of expression judgment, it was a landmark ruling. But what happened next was even more remarkable: within a few months, Chile complied with the Court's decision by amending its constitution and consigning film censorship to its authoritarian past.

Fortunately, direct prior censorship has all but disappeared today not just in Chile but in the vast majority of Latin America (Cuba being the notable exception), and the region is freer and more democratic because of it. Indeed, during the last two decades of the 20th century, there was a genuine democratic rebirth in Latin America, marked by the fall of military dictatorships, the end of the Cold War, and the adoption of democratic, rights-protective constitutions.

Nonetheless, in the area of free speech the legal remnants of authoritarianism often persisted long after democracy was restored. Under anachronistic *desacato* (contempt) laws, for example, journalists and others in many countries risked jail terms when expressing opinions critical of public officials or institutions.

Against this backdrop, the inter-American human rights system—composed of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (including, since 1998, its Office of the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression) and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights—has played a critical role in rolling back the vestiges of authoritarianism in Latin American legal codes and thus consolidating the transition to democratic forms of government.

Over the past decade, journalists and civil society advocates have successfully petitioned the Inter-American Commission and Court to strike down judicial decisions that restricted free speech, as well as the laws on which they were based. When Costa Rican journalist Mauricio

In these cases and others, the inter-American system has issued landmark decisions that not only provided individual relief but sought far-reaching legal and practical consequences. Perhaps even more significantly, states in the region have for the most part complied with these orders by reforming their domestic laws to better comply with hemispheric legal norms. Over time, inter-American case law has been directly incorporated into the national legislation and jurisprudence of a number of Latin American countries. In recent years, for example, Uruguay and Argentina decriminalized speech regarding matters of public interest; the Federal Supreme Court of Brazil struck down a dictatorship-era press law that resulted

**The emergence of the inter-American system as a meaningful forum for human rights protection has both buttressed and deepened democratic transitions.**

Herrera Ulloa was convicted of criminal defamation for reporting on alleged acts of corruption, the Inter-American Court overturned his conviction. When the owner of a Peruvian television station was stripped of his nationality and his control over his station after it aired reports on corruption and human rights abuses, the Inter-American Court ordered Peru to restore his rights. And when a Chilean environmental organization was denied government information about a logging project, the Inter-American Court ordered Chile to turn over the information and strengthen its access to information laws and procedures.

in censorship and imposed severe penalties for criminal defamation offenses; the Constitutional Court of Colombia issued a decision protecting the right to confidential sources; and the Supreme Court of Mexico struck down a vague criminal law that protected the honor and privacy of public officials. Furthermore, in the last decade, great progress has been made in removing some—though not all—of the more nefarious speech prohibitions, such as *desacato* laws, from the criminal codes of a number of Latin American countries.

We believe that while much of the progress in the area of freedom of ex-

pression can be attributed to the democratic explosion in Latin America in the 1980s and early 1990s, the simultaneous emergence of the inter-American system as a meaningful forum for human rights protection has both buttressed and deepened democratic transitions, not least by promoting a robust interpretation of the right to freedom of expression.

However, a number of important challenges remain in the struggle to guarantee free speech in Latin America. The Office of the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression calls these continuing challenges our “Hemispheric Agenda for the Defense of Freedom of Expression.”

First, the region has an alarming, lingering history of violence against journalists and impunity with regard to such crimes. A 2008 study by the Office of the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression on the murder of journalists and media workers between 1995 and 2005 identified 157 deaths in 19 countries in the hemisphere for reasons possibly related to the practice of journalism. The study found that the investigations into these crimes are, overwhelmingly, slow and plagued by serious procedural deficiencies, to the point that they neither established the facts nor punished those responsible. Convictions (of any kind) were handed down in only 32 of the 157 cases examined.

Unfortunately, the violence continues. In 2010, 27 journalists were killed in Latin America, including nine journalists in Honduras and thirteen in Mexico. While in the region’s authoritarian past governments themselves were responsible for much of the violent repression against critical voices, today powerful non-state actors—especially organized crime—have emerged as the principal threat to the lives and integrity of journalists, particularly those who report on issues such as drug trafficking, corruption and public security. This alarming situation requires governments in the countries where media workers are most at risk to take urgent and decisive action, such as the establishment of protection

programs for journalists and special prosecutorial units to investigate crimes against them.

Second, in spite of the aforementioned progress in rolling back *desacato* laws, many countries in Latin America still use criminal laws to punish speech and silence dissident voices. Those who criticize public officials or institutions continue to risk prison terms for crimes such as defamation in a number of countries in the region. Furthermore, other criminal offenses are sometimes used to criminalize social protest or the expression of opinions that differ from those of the authorities.

Third, while enormous progress has been made in eradicating direct prior censorship in the region, several forms of indirect censorship now pose a significant concern, including the arbitrary allocation of public resources such as government advertising, frequencies or subsidies; the arbitrary use of the mechanisms of regulation and oversight; and the creation of an environment of intimidation that inhibits dissident speech.

Fourth, the hemisphere faces diverse challenges on the subject of access to public information. A number of countries still have not enacted access to information laws and the accompanying enforcement regimes. In other countries, laws exist but may fall short of inter-American standards establishing that every person has the human right to access to information administered or produced by the state, without needing to prove a special interest in the information. Still other

countries face challenges in providing effective and appropriate mechanisms for requesting access to government information, and guaranteeing effective and independent controls to prevent administrative arbitrariness in granting or refusing access.

Finally, the public debate in Latin America often suffers from a lack of participation by social groups that have suffered discrimination or marginalization. Such groups lack access to institutional or private channels for the serious, robust and consistent exercise of their right to publicly express their ideas and opinions or to be informed of the issues that affect them. Society, in turn, is deprived of knowledge about their interests, customs, needs and ideas. States must therefore combat excessive concentration in the control and ownership of communications media, while taking affirmative steps to facilitate the participation of historically marginalized groups in the marketplace of ideas. Recognizing and facilitating the operation of community broadcasters is crucial in this regard.

These challenges, and many others, can only be met through the combined efforts of a variety of actors, including governments, the press and civil society. The inter-American human rights system will continue to play an important subsidiary role in the struggle to strengthen freedom of expression in the Americas, supporting the efforts of policymakers, press associations, non-governmental organizations and concerned citizens, while calling governments to account when they fall short of hemispheric free speech standards.



**Special Rapporteur Catalina Botero Marino** speaks at a press conference.

**Catalina Botero Marino**, a Colombian lawyer, has served as Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights since 2008.

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# Silencing the Media

Crime Syndicates and Repressive Governments **BY CARLOS LAURÍA**

**CITIZENS' RIGHTS TO BE INFORMED ON ISSUES** of public interest are being undermined throughout Latin America, damaging the health of democracy across the region. Violence from powerful criminal syndicates, abuse of state resources by authoritarian governments, and politicized judicial rulings are all producing increasing media censorship. Although not as blatant as during the era of military dictatorships, when journalists were murdered and "disappeared" in large numbers and armed forces dictated what could be reported, the re-emergence of censorship and self-censorship in the region is deeply worrisome.

Widespread violence and lawlessness have spread over the region in the last decade, undermining political stability and threatening the future of democracy. Reporters and media covering organized crime have come under siege.

The unprecedented number of murders, attacks, disappearances and threats are devastating investigative journalism. As a result, scores of journalists are forced to censor themselves; their media outlets often keep quiet to survive.

Powerful drug organizations disputing territory in Mexico, guerrillas and paramilitaries in war-ravaged areas of Colombia, criminal groups in politically volatile Honduras, violent street gangs in Guatemala, and drug traffickers in the Brazilian slums are terrorizing the news media. Undermined by pervasive corruption and judiciaries that are as overburdened as they are dysfunctional, governments across the region have failed to provide security, leaving the media wide open to attacks.

More than 30,000 people have been killed in drug-related murders since Mexican President Felipe Calderón took

office in December 2006 and launched a massive offensive against drug cartels, according to the Attorney General's Office. The killings reached their highest level in 2010, jumping by almost 60 percent from the previous year. More than 30 journalists have been killed or disappeared during Calderón's mandate, making Mexico one of the world's most dangerous countries for the press.

Mexican journalists outside Mexico City have almost abandoned any sort of investigative work. Basic reporting on crime has become a serious challenge in many areas across the country. Reporters are terrorized, while state authorities—largely fearful of (or corrupted by) drug lords—are unwilling to carry out their responsibilities. In Reynosa, a border town in the state of Tamaulipas, the drug cartels have total control over the city. They also control the flow of information,

and dictate what is news and what isn't. Shootouts in broad daylight, killings and cartel-blockades are not even covered. Reporters have been cowed into silence out of fear of violence.

The 2008 killing of veteran crime reporter Armando Rodríguez Carreón, known as "El Choco," shocked even violence-plagued Ciudad Juárez, which sits on the border with Texas. Rodríguez—who worked for the daily *El Diario*—had written a story accusing the state prosecutor's nephew of ties to drug traffickers a few days earlier. On November 13, 2008, the seasoned reporter was sitting in his car in the driveway of his home,

Tocoa region, was gunned down by unidentified assailants while he was driving home the night of March 24, 2010. Palacios had strongly opposed the 2009 coup and turned Channel 5 into an opposition station, according to his colleagues. He had been harassed, threatened and finally detained by military personnel in June 2009. The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights recommended precautionary measures but the government did not implement any safety program to protect Palacios.

The case was also marked by a series of investigative failures. The autopsy was conducted almost three months af-

mittee to Protect Journalists shows that during the five-decade civil conflict, journalists and editors—particularly those in the areas controlled by illegal armed actors—regularly censored themselves, fearing retribution from all sides. While lethal violence has ceded since 2002, Colombia is still one of the world's most dangerous countries for the press.

In Venezuela, the decade-long confrontation between the administration of President Hugo Chávez and the private media has seriously restricted media freedoms. Based on political decisions rather than transparent legal procedures, government regulators have pulled the broadcast concession of the oldest television station, RCTV, and revoked the licenses of dozens of radio stations in the last few years. The Venezuelan government, free press advocates agree, is gradually silencing opposing views in a clear attempt to control the flow of information and systematically suppress dissent.

Recently approved legislation has provoked increased concern about Chávez's efforts to censor news coverage. In late 2010, a lame-duck National Assembly passed a reform of the 2004 Law on Social Responsibility in Radio and Television that expanded broadcast regulations to the Internet. In the new provisions, messages that "incite or promote hatred," "disrespect authorities," "foment citizens' anxiety or alter public order" or "constitute war propaganda," will be banned. The legislation also limits online media content according to the time of the day, with adult content reserved for shows after midnight. Digital media that violate the law can be fined up to 13,000 bolivars (US\$3,000), while service providers that fail to respond to government inquiries could be fined up to "10 percent of the previous year's gross income," in addition to "72 hours of continuous suspension of services."

The Social Responsibility law, also known as the "content law," was approved in 2004 and has been widely criticized by international human rights groups for its broad and vaguely worded restrictions on free expression. For instance, Article

## The emergence of censorship and self-censorship in the region is deeply worrisome. Fear of violence or government repression stifles press freedom.

with his eight-year-old daughter in the back seat, when he was shot to death. A federal investigator assigned to the case was soon murdered; a month later, so was his successor. The killing produced a chilling effect on the city's press corps.

Criminal groups, ruthless street gangs and impunity have also influenced the press in nearby Central America. In 2010, nine Honduran reporters were killed in a wave of lethal violence. An in-depth report on the murders by the Committee to Protect Journalists found a pattern of poor and shoddy investigative work in most of the cases, all of which remain unsolved. The record series of murders occurred in a charged political climate as Honduran society broke down after a coup ousted former President Manuel Zelaya in 2009. Government officials in current President Porfirio Lobo's administration have sought to play down the crimes and the climate of impunity in the country.

The case of popular Honduran TV personality Nahúm Palacios Arteaga illustrates this pattern of crime and impunity. Palacios, 34, the anchor for Channel 5, the main broadcast station in the

ter Palacios had been gunned down; the coroner never examined the body after the murder. A prosecutor in charge of the case said the exhumation and autopsy were suddenly important because Honduran authorities had solicited the help of the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation. Investigators, according to the prosecutor, needed to show something to their U.S. counterparts.

In nearby Guatemala, drug-related violence has spiraled as gangs compete for smuggling routes into Mexico. Mexican drug cartels have been actively operating in the northern region of the country. Guatemalan forces tasked with fighting drug traffickers are out-powered. Reporters in northern areas are suppressing any coverage of crime in fear of retaliation. Self-censorship is so pervasive that massive gun battles between drug traffickers go unreported, according to the Guatemala City press group Centro de Reportes Informativos sobre Guatemala (Cerigua).

Threats of deadly violence have also silenced numerous reporters and media in Colombia. Research done by the Com-

29 bars television and radio stations from broadcasting messages that “promote, defend, or incite breaches of public order” or “are contrary to the security of the nation.” In order to comply with the law, broadcasters have cancelled critical news programming.

In Ecuador, official decisions to censor news coverage have alarmed local free-press advocates who believe President Rafael Correa’s administration intends to target critics and control information. Interrupting news programs on private television to air official rebuttals to criticism has become standard practice since 2010. The Ecuadoran government has a contentious relationship with the private press and has become increasingly intolerant toward criticism, local journalists said. Private network Teleamazonas was forced off the air for three days in late 2009 after it ran a story about the potential effects of natural gas exploration off southern Puná Island. Regulators found the network had “incited public disorder.”

Censorship is still far from being as pervasive as when it was an established mode of repression by the military regimes that dominated the region more than thirty years ago. But in this new, more democratic era, censorship and forced self-censorship have again become common for many Latin American journalists and media outlets, whether out of fear of violence or government repression. This alarming pattern is clearly undermining the media’s ability to report the news freely, but most importantly, it affects the fundamental rights of Latin American citizens to freedom of expression and access to information.

*Carlos Lauría is the Americas senior program coordinator of the New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists since 2002. He is responsible for monitoring, documenting, and developing responses to press freedom violations in Latin America. As chief strategist and spokesperson for CPJ on media issues in the region, he writes regularly on press issues for media throughout Latin America and Europe.*

# Beyond Intimidation and Exile

## The Revival of Investigative Reporting

BY GUSTAVO GORRITI

I WROTE MY FIRST INVESTIGATIVE STORY ON a sturdy Olivetti typewriter, thoughts pounding into the paper with an irregular staccato that would slow down as night approached dawn. That was back in early 1982. I was a reporter at Peru’s *Caretas*, a weekly newsmagazine, already grasping the fundamental dynamics of much of Latin American investigative reporting: Publish, try not to perish. I was fortunate to work with a great editor—the talented and brave Enrique Zileri. He was the magazine’s hard driving director, who could inspire or terrify *Caretas*’ eclectic group of journalists with a simple, binary alternative: Produce a scoop or suffer temporal but stinging disgrace.

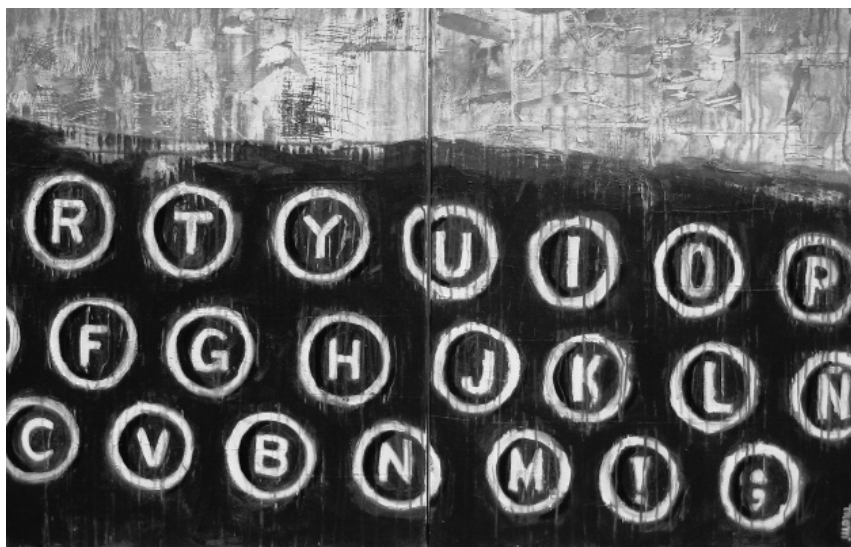
In later years I would learn through personal experiences and those of my colleagues that the greatest hazard a Latin American investigative journalist faces is an internal one. It is the censorship and sabotage that emanates from

the top of the enterprise—the owners and managers—trickling down through pliable editors until it settles into frequently corrupted newsrooms.

As editor and publisher of *Caretas*, Zileri stood out as a valuable exception. There is no telling what an experienced, relentless editor can accomplish by pushing, spurring, cajoling, sometimes even praising reporters into bringing back the best possible information. Of course, this ought to be what every editor does, and yet it is a rare newsroom in Latin America lucky enough to have such an editor.

### HAZARDS OF REPORTING

In covering the Shining Path’s bloody insurgency during the 1980’s, for instance, my weekly task was straightforward: to find out and report what was happening in the fast growing scenarios of violence. With the surreal expressions of the Shining Path’s Cultural Revolution kind





of Maoism and the lethal schizophrenia of the Peruvian government's repression in play, reporting was admittedly arduous, though within the expected hazards of journalism. I found the obstacles and perils in the field were nicely counterweighted by fear of failure were I ever to return empty-handed to the newsroom.

Reporting was defined differently at other news organizations in Peru. Journalists there were expected to gather allegations that would support their publication's ideology or to concoct reports that were more exorcism than information. For a long time, Peru's newspaper of record almost didn't report on the raging internal war, as if disdainful silence would dissipate it into oblivion.

Reporting on high-level corruption was close to impossible in most of Peru's publications. Early in my journalism career I found out why; corruption was not aberrant but systemic, with networked nodes interlinked in sometimes surprising ways. In late 1983 I wrote my first exposé on Vladimiro Montesinos, who fled the country because of the story's publication. But then he came back and piggybacked his way into power by being a secret adviser to people in power with much greater ambitions than capabilities. The fact that he was a natural as a spy didn't harm either. His path to power was fraught with crimes but eventually he found himself as the adviser in the shadows to the insecure newly elected President Alberto Fujimori.

This was in 1990. In slightly over a year, Montesinos purged and secured control over the military, police and, chiefly, the intelligence services. He also developed a close relationship with the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) that was to last through the decade, even as he assumed informal control of the primary activity of organized crime in Peru—drug trafficking. (This was not the only such case in Latin America of these overlapping connections—Panama's Manuel Antonio Noriega comes to mind—but Montesinos was by far the smarter crook.) In less than two years he and Fujimori carried out an internal

president-led coup d'état that when the dust settled left them with undisputed control over all branches of government.

In the process, I was seized and "disappeared" by the Army's intelligence service, and then I reappeared thanks to their poor operational planning. Eventually I found myself unemployable; even some longtime friends were afraid of being seen with me at the time. Facing these pressures, I had to leave Peru some months later.

Soon I would find out that using journalism to expose the actions of Montesinos abroad, especially in the U.S., was almost as difficult as it was in Peru, though for different reasons. Editors were fine with publishing a story or an op-ed I wrote on many Latin American subjects, but they refused to even consider publishing investigative stories on Montesinos or Fujimori, no matter how meticulously I had researched them.

What was solid, well-documented investigative journalism—that would have been seen as such under normal circumstances—was dismissed as crusading journalism or even conspiracy-theory journalism when the subject was Montesinos. But that is not the point of this story. It is that as a good spy Montesinos documented almost everything that could be of use to him later on—dirty deals, transactions, betrayals. Before his time, East Germany's Ministry for State Security, known as the Stasi, had pioneered overdocumentation of both surveillance and espionage. Mostly through videotape, Montesinos did the same, clearly with the thought that the information would be perpetually under his control. In that presumption, he was wrong.

#### WHAT THE VIDEOS REVEALED

When the Fujimori regime crumbled in 2000, a significant though incomplete set of Montesinos's tapes was seized by the new regime. This prompted investigations by a number of official anticorruption entities whose zeal would soon ebb. But the dozens of videotapes remained a valuable contribution of Montesinos to the field of corruption studies. They were minimalist

theater at its best: same room, furnished with a Third World bureaucrat's notion of official opulence; same interlocutor: a usually silky Montesinos (perhaps more intimidating because of that), buying, bribing, conniving with a long parade of captains of industry and finance, politicians, judges, prosecutors and, last but not least, media owners.

The owners of almost all of the nation's TV companies, its most important radio station, and many of Peru's newspapers received editorial instructions from Montesinos. Here he is, on the tapes, telling them what and how to report—a lesson in disinformation. There are videos of owners being handed piles of cash, money they took at times with a greed bordering on lust. Today, a few of the less powerful ones are in prison; one is a fugitive, living comfortably in Switzerland with his son now in control of his TV station. Most are even better off than they were then. They retain control of their media companies, banks and businesses, and have increased their large leverage over economic activity, political discourse and, to a large extent, media output.

#### PRESIDENTIAL CORRUPTION IN PANAMA

I also lived through those sorts of dynamics at work in another latitude. In 1996, I was hired to be the deputy director of Panama's *La Prensa*. My task was straightforward: to strengthen the paper's investigative journalism. *La Prensa* founder Roberto Eisenmann and I were Nieman Fellows together in 1985-'86 and through the years we encouraged each other as we confronted autocrats in our respective countries, he with Noriega, then me with Fujimori and Montesinos.

In structuring the ownership of *La Prensa*, Eisenmann was visionary. Given the dictatorship in place and knowing that any major investor would have his arm twisted in no time by government officials, *La Prensa* spread its ownership widely. No person could own more than one percent of the newspaper's shares. That way, its board and its editors were able to do independent journalism. Con-

fronting first Omar Torrijos and then the far more vicious Noriega, *La Prensa* held strongly to its values, paid a painful price in that struggle, and after Noriega's downfall reopened with great prestige, soon becoming profitable and the newspaper of record in Panama.

This was a newspaper that any reporter would be proud to work for, as I was. I put myself energetically to the task of doing investigative reporting—with no better place to start than with the country's financial sector. The first investigation I led was on the fraudulent collapse of a bank. As long as those brought into the limelight were foreigners or relative unknowns, there wasn't a problem. But in time (as would be the case in all other major investigations) the corrupt bankers led to an important Colombian drug trafficker, then to people with high influence in Panama's regime, then to the president's son-in-law.

President Ernesto Pérez Balladares decided to expel me from Panama. I decided to resist and a standoff ensued for several months. The paper's board, especially its president, Juan Arias, firmly supported me, which made a huge difference. But support for me was far from unanimous at the newspaper. One of *La Prensa's* founders, Ricardo Alberto Arias, was at the time Panama's foreign minister, and he sided strongly with the president. At one point in the midst of swiftly aborted direct talks, he told me that he believed that only a person with at least three generations of ancestors buried in Panama's soil should be allowed to do investigative reporting in the country.

In the end I was able to stay. I continued my work there for five years, exposing many more cases of corruption, some implicating President Pérez Balladares. As a result of one story, he was stripped of his U.S. visa. Afterwards, Panama's attorney general made a point by indicting and suing me and the other members of the investigative team, just as he had after the publication of other significant exposés.

The support I received from Juan Arias, *La Prensa's* board president, was

crucial to do these investigations. But after nearly five years he decided to step down. At that point, Ricardo Alberto Arias, now no longer foreign minister, led a laborious takeover drive to win enough shareholders' votes to take control of the paper. He took over *La Prensa* in 2001. I had left Panama a few months before and returned to Peru, but excellent journalists who had worked with me were exiled to minor positions at the paper as Arias tried and for a time succeeded in neutralizing its investigative power.

What the crooks couldn't do from outside, they were now able to do from within. The situation had a positive turn of events, which to this day holds. Fernando Berguido, a 2011 Nieman Fellow, became *La Prensa's* publisher in 2004—and for two years also its editor—and put it back on track. A top Panamanian investigative journalist, Rolando Rodríguez, was appointed associate director, and he steered *La Prensa* into uncovering cases of corruption, old and new. He eventually reported on the house arrest, however brief, of Pérez Balladares as part of the prosecution for past, let's say, misdeeds.

## What was solid, well-documented investigative journalism was dismissed as crusading journalism or even conspiracy theory journalism.

### THE DIGITAL PATH

Panama's *La Prensa* and Zileri's *Caretas* were exceptional places where investigative journalism was encouraged and defended, though both had to pay a price for doing it. All over Latin America, the number of newspapers, magazines and electronic media that have an uncompromising approach to investigate high-level corruption is exceedingly small. It is noteworthy, therefore, how many important investigative stories have been published in Latin America since the 1980s. Yet these represent just a fraction of what is needed if journalists, as the public's watchdogs, are to have a substantial and

sustainable impact on corruption.

Since this past February I have been at IDL-Reporteros ([reporteros.pe](http://reporteros.pe)), a small, web-based, nonprofit investigative publication in Peru that I co-founded and direct. The equivalent to our publisher is Peru's foremost human rights organization, IDL (Instituto de Defensa Legal). Our financial support is from the Open Society Institute, which is the principal funder for an expanding crop of Latin American nonprofit investigative journalism units. We are part of a Latin American—and a global—effort to stem and reverse the decay of investigative journalism.

Ours is a pioneering effort striving to find a sustainable model while trying to do and publish the best possible investigative journalism. It is too early to know which of the trails we are blazing will become well-traveled roads and which might be abandoned. Digital media present us with exhilarating possibilities for ushering in a new era of significant investigative journalism. But whether a thoroughly investigated exposé that makes it harder for powerful crooks to steal, extort or intimidate

comes from a typewriter or is produced on a digital tablet, its existence—then and now—represents success.

**Gustavo Gorriti**, a 1986 Nieman Fellow at Harvard, is the founder and director of IDL-Reporteros, a digital, nonprofit investigative publication in Peru. Last year the Ibero-American New Journalism Foundation (FNPI) honored him with its CEMIX+FNPI New Journalism Prize in recognition of his outstanding career as an investigative journalist.

*A version of this article appeared in the March 2011 Nieman Reports.*

# The Law as Censor

## Freedom of Press in Ecuador

BY MÓNICA ALMEIDA

I WAS HEADED SOMEWHERE IN A TAXI WITH MY 10-year-old daughter Sasha. It was a Saturday afternoon in September 2009, and we had just returned to Quito after a year at Harvard with a Nieman Fellowship. The taxi driver was listening to a speech by Ecuadoran President Rafael Correa. He didn't have much choice of programming—most radio stations were in the so-called *enlace*, universal broadcasting.

Correa's two-hour radio address about his weekly accomplishments was rebroadcast on all the public media and most radio stations. Sasha and I got into the taxi precisely at the moment when the segment "Freedom of Expression" was starting. Correa began to insult *Diario El Universo*, the daily 'on the record' of Ecuador and where I have worked for the past 13 years. "Corrupt, mediocre, and unpatriotic," were some of the adjectives the president used that day. For most Ecuadorans this was nothing of the ordinary. For the last three years, the president had been engaging in these kinds of attacks against journalists.

But my daughter, who was listening to these broadcasts for the first time, got scared. She started to barrage me with questions. What was happening? Why was the president calling her mommy "corrupt"? Thankfully, we arrived at our destination. I waited until Sasha and I were alone to explain that the insults were just talk and not important at all. I tried to explain to her how things had changed in Ecuador in the year that we lived in Cambridge.

In times of "Revolución Ciudadana,"—the so-called citizens' revolution—journalists have become a primary target for insults from President Correa, who considers the media he does not control as his primary political opposition.

But now, the situation has become more serious than insults and four judicial processes against a newspaper and three media workers. A Communications Law, which would seriously restrict press freedom, is under consideration by the parliament. And because this bill is taking too long to be approved, Correa wants the people to approve a regulatory council to restrict freedom of speech.

The disagreement between President Correa and journalists (and their media) rests in this University of Illinois economist's incapacity to understand that we journalists carry out the role of watchdogs and hold the powers-that-be accountable to their citizens.

a struggle against a leader who has more than 65% popular support after four years in power. In effect, journalists provide some of the few voices critical of the government. Columnists are often more inclined towards the opposition.

The government blames journalists for everything bad that has happened in the country like the bank crisis of 1999 and lately the rise of crime. It is a stigmatization that creates an inhospitable environment in which to work, especially since—just as in any other profession—we can make mistakes.

Attacks can arise even from little mistakes—like an error or a perceived error in a headline. Sometimes I've even had to

**Insults and intimidation are all too common in Ecuador. In February, President Rafael Correa called the press "hitmen with pens."**

Convinced that he is the anointed person designated to carry out one of the most radical transformations of Ecuador, in great part due to the high prices for oil and his great capacity for work, as well as his intelligence, Correa does not tolerate criticism.

He would prefer to have the media as an echo chamber that praises his accomplishments, that is, publishes pure propaganda. Or one that publishes the corrupt practices of everybody else but his officials or his party's allies.

Ecuador presents a panorama in which the credibility of political parties is around 26%; opposition parties are still trying to find a way to renew themselves (or at least to cover their backs) to wage

explain to someone I've just met that a mistake in a headline should not be considered on the same level of "abuse" as stealing public funds because there is a big difference between being a journalist and being a state official.

In this smear campaign against journalists and media that also includes mandatory interruptions of journalistic programs on television to broadcast messages against their hosts, two media workers have been accused of terrorism. A word that is becoming very convenient to the government and the judges who inspired themselves in Correa's words.

The first is Juan Alcívar, from *La Hora* newspaper, accused of throwing a tear gas bomb during Correa's visit to





La Concordia. The second is the Shuar Indian José Acacho, from the communitarian radio La Voz de Arutam (Voice of Arutam), who is also a leader of the Shuar Federation. This radio broadcasted an uprising against the government on September 30, 2009, in the Amazonia.

Needless to say the government also denies information and refuses to grant interview requests to certain media. And just in 2010, the state denied the renovation of broadcast licenses for two radios. In addition, Correa has created a propaganda machine for the achievements of the government. On the one hand, Correa maintains or controls a group of public media (19, including six state-run and another 13 confiscated from bank stockholders—the latter which were supposed to be sold two years ago).

And on the other, official advertising in the media has exploded in the last four years to count for more than US\$190 million between 2007 and 2010. This number is around 0.31% of our Gross Domestic Product—or a little bit less



The key points of the bill? To create a “communication council” controlled by the government that could shut down media and forbid people without a university degree in Social Communication to work in the media.

## Those of us who feel a passion for journalism need to have the courage to practice our profession with honesty and accuracy.

that the 2011 budget of the Ministry of Agriculture.

This amount does not take into account the production of these commercials, the billboards, communications advising and information fairs. Just during the World Cup, the government spent \$900,000 in transmissions accusing the media of robbery, lies and even murder.

As one can suppose, official advertising is sometimes used to reward some type of ‘loyalties’.

The new Constitution gave another weapon to the government, a dangerous one. It is mandatory for the Congress to approve a Communications Law and the country has been discussing a number of singular norms about the press.

In spite of all the officialist lobbying, even the majority party in parliament, Alianza PAIS, has shown itself reluctant to sign a blank check and just approve the proposed Communications Law that the executive branch wants. Even the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights has asked the Assembly not to restrict the freedom of speech in Ecuador.

As a way to ‘get it done,’ President Correa included two proposals related to the media in a referendum to “amend” the Constitution, which is only 28 months old and which was drawn up by the officialist majority. In fact, he proposes to change the Constitution although the executive power cannot legally do this without a Constitutional Assembly.

These proposed changes include a new regulation through which private communications firms (not just the media), their directors and principal stockholders could not hold any shares in companies outside the communications field.

And the second would create a regulatory council that would establish content norms for the printed and broadcast media but would also establish criteria for subsequent imposition of liability.

In other words, a simple council (some nine or eleven people) will have the power not only to control media content but to judge journalists.

In this manner, “the citizens’ revolution” appeals to the supreme will of the people to tighten the screws to limit freedoms for all Ecuadorans. If this rule is approved, the result will be self-imposed censorship.

And where are the journalists in the middle of all this? We are still playing in a democratic field; Ecuador doesn’t have a tradition of persecuted or disappeared journalists. But this is a difficult moment for those who feel a passion for journalism. We have the challenge to do our best to keep our audiences informed and not to let our personal feelings be expressed in our stories. Maybe I’m naive but I still believe that we have our words and our stories to counteract this campaign.

We have to get our voices heard outside the country to explain that Ecuador is not Venezuela—but freedom of speech is in danger here. We need to have the courage to practice our profession with honesty and accuracy.

And, most important of all, we have to feel the dignity of our profession. Last Sunday, my husband told a friend, who used to work for this government, “I’m proudly married to a ‘corrupt’ journalist.” And whether the government calls me—and all watchdog journalists—“corrupt,” I’m proud to be a journalist, defending citizens’ rights in Ecuador.

*Mónica Almeida is the Quito editor of Guayaquil-headquartered El Universo. She was a 2009 Nieman Fellow at Harvard.*





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# NEW VOICES

A new wave of independent, forward-thinking and critical journalism is spreading throughout the continent. Here are some examples of these new voices, ranging from investigative journalism websites to new dailies and business models.

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# Journalism in Paraguay

Between Silent Tradition and Noisy Democracy **BY BENJAMIN FERNANDEZ BOGADO**

**NEW TECHNOLOGIES HAVE STARTED TO PLAY AN** important role in building a more participatory civic society in Paraguay. The Internet reached here in 1997, but even now only one in ten Paraguayans has access. The number of users is, however, increasing among the young. Some civic programs are pushing for more access to the Internet and teaching how to use it. For example, Fundación Libre with its CETICOM (Centro Tecnológico de Información y Comunicación) offers courses on how to develop media on the Internet. Since its first efforts, many people have started their own blogs and spread the idea of the importance of new technologies to advance freedom of the press and free speech. Much remains to be done in this field, which could be very important in encouraging a sense of power to publish ideas without fear of censorship or control.

Fear has played an important role throughout Paraguayan history, and, as a consequence, freedom is a ambiguous word here. It depends on who defines it, how it is defined and in what context. For instance, the so-called “father of journalism,” Carlos Antonio López, the Paraguayan leader who replaced long-term dictator José Gaspar Rodríguez de Francia, was also editor of *El Paraguay Independiente*, the country’s first newspaper, during his period in office. There is clearly a conflict of interest between being the editor of the country’s only newspaper and being the non-elected

political leader, one who also wrote the first Paraguayan constitution which states that nobody may own a printing company without first receiving permission from the “Supreme Government.”

Free speech and freedom of the press evolved slowly throughout Paraguayan history. During the last two decades (1989-2009) some educated people linked democracy with making these two important human rights key elements in building a political process that would give citizens full access to participation. Yet Paraguay, according to the Chilean pollsters’ *Latinobarómetro*, is one of the Latin American countries least enthusiastic about democracy. Almost half of all Paraguayans are ready to give up some freedoms in exchange for better economic and social conditions.

## EDUCATION

Freedoms of press and speech are not appreciated in a country in which investment in education during the long dictatorship of General Alfredo Stroessner (1954-1989) was 1% of the Gross National Product (GNP). In the subsequent democratic period, education investment has reached just 2.8% of GNP, far lower than in Uruguay, Costa Rica and Chile, where people view democracy enthusiastically as a means of building a strong state based upon the rule of law. There is a clear link between education, free speech and freedom of the press. It is impossible to participate in the demo-

cratic discussion without information or knowledge. At present, democratic daily conversations in the media deal with irrelevant issues due to the low capacity to understand complex issues.

The level of illiteracy is still high. The government speaks of a level of about 10%, but in reality it is over 45%, according to former Minister of Education Horacio Galeano Perrone, whom I interviewed on Radio Libre recently. This number of illiterates makes it difficult to enjoy freedom of speech and of the press.

Newspaper circulation is very low for a country with more than six million people. Fewer than 130,000 copies are distributed from the capital city, Asunción. *ABC Color*, the most popular newspaper, sells 20,000 copies daily, whereas in 1984, before it was closed down for five years by the Stroessner regime, sales had reached 80,000. This large fall in circulation at a time of increased population is proof of disenchantment with the press. Internet connectivity in Paraguay is still very low: 15% of the population has access, but the plan is to increase it in the coming years. Many people see the press as more interested in confrontation and dispute with the political establishment than in helping the people participate in the democratic process with knowledge and information.

Some recent polls also show that even though people are disenchanted with the executive, legislative and judi-



From left to right: newspapers roll off a traditional printing press; scenes of people reading and selling newspapers in Paraguay.

cial institutions of democracy, they still trust the media and the Catholic Church. Nevertheless, there has been a big drop in that trust compared to just after the overthrow of Stroessner in 1989, when people held journalists and the media in high esteem.

Lack of formal education, untrustworthy media and the very small distribution of newspapers and books are key factors in understanding why free speech and freedom of the press did not play a more important role in creating enthusiasm for democracy. The 1992 Constitution says that freedoms of press and speech are to be enjoyed with “responsibility, equity and veracity.” From a legal point of view, the current Paraguayan constitution is one of the most advanced in the region in terms of protecting freedoms of speech and press and authorizing public access to information. Articles 24 to 29 repeat the importance of the freedom of expression and the freedom of the press in strengthening democracy and human values. Indeed, the Paraguayan constitution is often used as a model in Latin America. It protects the interests of citizens as well as those of journalists, photographers and media owners. It clearly forbids governments from closing newspapers and magazines and shutting down radio or television stations because they disturb the political establishment.

There are also some important advances in the criminal code, even though one can be sued under the criminal code

rather than the civil code in libel cases. This provision was used by some political figures against journalists who dared to publish articles on corruption. Judicial decisions show that in some cases judges consider the interests of politicians to be more important than the interests of individuals, specifically where journalists decided to publish articles covering corruption, which is still a big problem in Paraguay. Annual reviews by Transparency International still list Paraguay as one of the most corrupt countries in Latin America. Impunity is high in Paraguay, where people who commit a crime have a 99% possibility of not being prosecuted, fined or sent to prison. This situation makes journalists despair of reporting cases of corruption, because they see their work as useless and without any support from the judiciary. As many people have observed: “Under democracy we can say whatever we like, but nothing happens when we complain. With democracy we can talk, but we cannot afford to eat.”

#### FOCUS ON NEW TECHNOLOGIES

New technologies are an opportunity, but they also present a series of challenges in Paraguay.

A major social evolution took place following the arrival of democracy in 1989. Although people are no longer afraid of expressing ideas, lack of education makes it very difficult for them to hold serious discussions on diverse issues.

Another important but sensitive element is that two languages are present in Paraguay. People speak Guaraní (an indigenous language) and Spanish. About 60% of the population speaks only Guaraní, whereas Spanish is the language of commerce and politics. This situation restricts fluency in the expression of ideas. There is a long way to go to make Paraguay a fully bilingual country where people can comfortably express ideas in both languages. The state is beginning to teach Guaraní to some and Spanish as a second language to others, but the results after almost 20 years of implementation are poor because of a shortage of teachers with a good command of both Guaraní and Spanish.

Freedom of speech and of the press require the encouragement of reading in order to give people the vocabulary and the ideas necessary to participate in conversation and discussion. In neighboring Argentina, the former rector of the Universidad de Buenos Aires, Guillermo Jaime Etcheverry, wrote in his book *La Tragedia Educativa* that a young student in Buenos Aires uses fewer than 300 words to communicate daily, whereas the Spanish language has more than 100,000 words. If this is the situation in Buenos Aires, one can only imagine how many words are used in Paraguay.

Paraguayans are not able and free to participate because they are ashamed to express their ideas as they are not trained to do so. It is rare to find Para-

guayan families where members express their ideas freely over lunch or dinner. The authoritarian tradition permeated every part of society, making silence and self-restriction part of the national culture. Paraguay can be defined in many ways as a silent society where social control still inhibits people who want to express their own ideas in school or social gatherings—and this attitude permeates both the press and the public's perception of the press.

#### THE ROLE OF EDUCATION

To conclude, it is not sufficient to merely enshrine freedoms of speech and press in the Constitution. We Paraguayans need to understand that it is necessary to build a social consensus on the importance of both freedoms in a country which suffered for so long from censorship, fear and the persecution of ideas. It is necessary to reduce inequality in education and improve access to new technologies, but at the same time it is important to promote reading, publications and access to public libraries in order to give people the tools to enjoy these freedoms.

Paraguay has experienced a long tradition of silence in its two hundred years of independence. Presently, the country is enjoying more than twenty years of democracy. However, the impact of past censorship upon the population is clear. Education is needed to promote both democracy and the overall understanding of freedom.

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# Why I Created a New Newspaper in Bolivia

Paper reels, printing presses...and iPads

BY RAÚL PEÑARANDA U.

**DURING MY NIEMAN YEAR AT HARVARD, I CAREFULLY** kept my eye on the newspaper crisis. In the United States, ever since the middle of the last decade, journalists have been fired; the number of pages in print media has drastically dropped, reporters' salaries have shrunk, and advertising has considerably diminished. All this, I observed, was fundamentally due to competition from the Internet. The public informs itself for free instead of paying for newspapers and magazines.

I returned to Bolivia in mid-2008 with the idea that the future of journalism (the present?) was based on the Internet and that printed media were destined to be a rarity that only the rich could afford. And what did I do a short time after arriving home? I helped to start up a traditional newspaper. With reels of paper, a printing press and everything else print media implies and even with a name rooted in traditional print media: *Página Siete* (Page Seven).

I know that this assessment seems self-contradictory, but it is not entirely irrational. First of all, I have twenty years of experience in print media, so it feels normal to carry on this way. Second, access to the Internet is low in Latin America and particularly in Bolivia, which means that the newspaper crisis is less imminent. Third, newspapers in Bolivia have always operated in an environment of economic restrictions, compared to their North American counterparts, so they operate more efficiently. Fourth, I genuinely believed the La Paz market had space for another newspaper because of the relative lack of credibility of the leading newspaper here, *La Razón*. Fifth and most important, because I was sure that

this newspaper had to follow a short- and mid-range plan through which we could gradually leave print behind and lead ourselves into the digital world.

At that time, my obsession was the same as throughout my career—how to better inform the public. This means pointing out the nuances in the news, digging deeper into the significance of events, offering independent opinions, and providing the context for news. In other words, I have always wanted to present the news in a deeply pluralistic and independent manner.

I believed that a newspaper of this type was necessary in Bolivia. A landlocked country of ten million inhabitants in the heart of South America, Bolivia is experiencing a period of deep transformation. President Evo Morales, who is in his sixth year of office, has taken a series of measures in favor of indigenous sectors—which make up more than half of the population. This policy made him popular with that majority, but his aggressive rhetoric against the opposition and the business community has aggravated political polarization. His domestic outlook reflects itself abroad: he has expelled the U.S. ambassador and maintains a strong political and economic alliance with Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez.

The new polarization in Bolivia called for objective, independent observation of events.

We have more than managed to accomplish our goals on the editorial side of *Página Siete*. We have built up a staff of 30 reporters that manage to get daily scoops, as well as participate in long-term investigative projects. Every week,



we publish an in-depth interview with a significant public figure. Many of Bolivia's most important intellectuals write for the paper—ranging from strong Evo supporters to opposition figures to indigent activists and even a radical lesbian feminist. Our goal is to cultivate the expression of different voices and open dialogue in a polarized society, all the while emphasizing robust reporting and verification of facts.

Our objectives were clear, as was the socio-political stage on which we were choosing to launch our newspaper. But first we needed to secure a business model that would sustain us economically.

Raúl Garáfulic, the president of the company, and I have always been in agreement about the editorial goals of our new project, but we debated a lot about the crisis in the print media. We recognized that our Internet version would have to be vigorous and versatile. We understood that we would need to use the new technologies right from the start of our project. Around that time, in mid-2009, the sales of the iPad began to take off around the world and major newspapers began to look at this novelty as a lifeline.

With all this in mind, we did not know exactly how we would create a newspaper business which could both reflect the Bolivian reality and be viable and self-sustainable. The more we talked about iPads and new technologies, the more we seemed to lose the way to finance our operations. It is well-known that with very few exceptions, most media are operating at a loss on the Internet. Not even the *New York Times*, with 150 million yearly hits, manages to make a profit on the web. How could a modest newspaper in South America's poorest country do so?

Then it occurred to Garáfulic that rather than thinking about how to finance an iPad application for the newspaper, we might look into financing and distributing the iPads themselves. We entered into long negotiations with Apple for the rights to become an official distributor of the tablets. At the same time, we pitched the idea to local banks. It

would actually be the banks that sold the 3-G iPads (the most expensive version, with a cost of around \$800 in the U.S., but that had excellent connectivity in the main Bolivian cities). The iPad could be paid off over a three-year period, and interested buyers could obtain a consumer loan. Almost half a million people in the country receive their pay through direct deposit; all of them would become eligible clients. Another interesting fact is that in Bolivia there are almost 200,000 smartphone users, that is, a perfect niche market for our idea. The offer would be the following: the consumer, through the bank, would pay \$140 down and then subscribe to the iPad version of the newspaper for \$35 monthly. That is, the reader would be subscribing to our newspaper for three years and receive a free iPad. Or, another way of looking at it, the reader would be buying an iPad with three-years' credit... and receive a free subscription to our newspaper. The new subscriber, on turning on the iPad, has our newspaper as a homepage.

This initiative is based on the following criteria: first, in Bolivia, access to credit is relatively difficult; thus, enabling the reader to buy the iPad on credit is an interesting offer; second, the middle and upper classes—and particularly the lower-middle class—are greatly interested in gaining access to new technologies. Parents see the computer and Internet as a way to better the quality of education for their children and help their future careers at universities or the work world. In particular, the iPad, with its abundance of neat applications, is a device longed for by millions of people in the world and obviously also in Bolivia.

The idea is economically viable. It has tremendous potential, will exponentially increase the number of our readers, and will help to establish a different business model in an industry that has not changed much since the 18th century. *Página Siete* hopes to sell, progressively, up to 10,000 iPads yearly. That is to say, we hope shortly to be the newspaper with the greatest circulation in the country. We calculate, if everything goes well, that

within three years, two thirds of our readers will follow us on new technology and the rest on paper.

The distribution of iPads began slowly in January 2011. At that time, *Página Siete* was almost a year old and had already become the second most important newspaper in La Paz, in terms of sales as well as influence. The Sunday circulation was about 10,000 copies, about a third of that of the leading newspaper.

I am confident that this model of distribution will make *Página Siete* the most read newspaper in the country and the most financially solid. I also believe that this model is an idea that other newspapers—here and abroad—can use.

In the meantime, whether on paper or iPad, many of the goals we had set out when we inaugurated the newspaper have been adequately fulfilled. We have managed to keep our editorial pages open to diverse viewpoints. Our news section hosts scoops, as well as interesting features and investigative reporting. Several of our stories and investigations have had important repercussions. We discovered, for example, that a Peruvian female prisoner had been held 60 days chained to the bed in her cell as punishment in a La Paz jail. The publication of this story forced prison authorities to come up with new rules for prisoner treatment, and the officers and authorities responsible were fired. The Defensoría del Pueblo—a state human rights advocacy agency—drew up a plan for the defense of human rights in the prisons. This is what newspapers are for!

*Raúl Peñaranda is a journalist who was a 2008 Nieman Fellow at Harvard. Editor-in-chief of *Página Siete* in Bolivia, he has worked as a correspondent for AP and ANSA. He founded the Bolivian weeklies Nueva Economía and La Época, both of which are still in existence. He was managing editor of Última Hora and editorial page editor of La Razón.*





# Citizen Media

## Mobile Phone Democracy **BY KARA ANDRADE**

**IN OCTOBER OF 2009, MY HUSBAND AND I DROVE** back down to Guatemala, the country of my birth, 3,118.5 miles, 53 hrs 1 minute of driving according to BING maps, all the way from California. While I'd made similar drives with my mother, this time we weren't headed down to bring back some family member or to be at the mercy of U.S. immigration officials to determine our legal status in the United States. This time we weren't leaving because we were sick of being treated like *mojados* and maybe we just wouldn't come back.

This time I was driving down to Guatemala as a Fulbright scholar, on a grant awarded by the U.S. State Department, making me a diplomatic representative of the United States (the irony doesn't escape me). My Fulbright project was to research online citizen media and to create a collaborative citizen journalism website for Guatemalans to share informa-

tion from their mobile phones to a website. With all my community organizing, nonprofit and journalism background, I was going down to listen, to learn and to orchestrate an online participatory space for civic issues in Guatemala.

I already knew that one of Guatemala's biggest problems was internal communication (the reason why someone in Puerto Barrios has no clue what is happening in San Marcos), the lack of which is then exacerbated outside the country. Communication was prohibitively expensive so people often could not obtain information outside their municipalities. They often turned, as they do now, to community radio stations, many of them deemed pirate stations by the government. My family in the United States, myself included, wanted to know what was happening in Bananera, in Chiquimula, in Puerto Barrios, in Guatemala City.

We wanted to share mundane events like the patron saint festivals, *las ferias*, the processions, and to find out news about catastrophes. Cheap, easy communication was essential for those living within the country and those trying to maintain a transnational connectedness.

It is also important to address communication and access when looking at the rise of citizen journalism, participatory media and citizen media—information produced by people who are not professional journalists or reporters. Affordability and ubiquitous access such as Internet cafes, Telecenters and mobile phones democratize information. For much of the time Guatemala and the rest of Central America weren't part of the information revolution.

**Neto exhibits his iPhone with the backdrop of Antigua, Guatemala.**

But communication has changed in Central America. Guatemala's evolving mobile sector, representative of the region, shows how this technology can offer unprecedented participation in both local and global civic conversations and actions. It is presenting an opportunity for nation-building (however nascent) and democratization that neither the Guatemalan government nor U.S. and European foreign policy have been able to do.

It became obvious things had changed when Twitter user Jeanfer was arrested by Guatemalan authorities on the charges of "intent to incite financial panic" for sending out this tweet: "Primera acción real, 'sacar el pisto de Banrural' y quebrar el banco de los corruptos." "First real action, 'to take the money out of Banrural' and break the bank of the corrupt." He was arrested and spent the night in jail, whereupon the Twitter community raised funds to help him pay for a lawyer. In the same month that many human rights and mining activists had received death threats via SMS (the acronym for Short Message Service or "text messages," prominent lawyer Rodrigo Rosenberg, allegedly fearing he would be killed, recorded a YouTube video blaming President Colom and his wife for such a deed. The video was released the same weekend Rosenberg's body was found shot in Guatemala City's wealthy Zone 10.

These examples show how the privatization of telecommunications creates a competitive market for citizens to express themselves, to communicate and to access much needed information. In many ways it's an awakening in Guatemala, to the first "brick" or foundation of a democratic society, of the right to express one's opinion publicly and for that opinion to play a role in one's own community and in self-governance.

A social fabric or an imagined social community is being spun from pixels—thousands of people who are creating their own Wordpress.com or Blogger.com, creating civic group Facebook Fan pages like Movimiento Cívico Nacional and Voces de Cambio, organizing collec-

tive actions on Twitter and Facebook like the protests in Guatemala City asking President Colom to step down because of Rodrigo Rosenberg's YouTube video allegations. There are Twitter hashtags to follow impunity efforts, national emergencies, traffic, weather, tax season.

In many developing and emerging markets with a lack of infrastructure and investment in traditional communication networks such as landlines and other cable-dependent communication, the telecom sector leapfrogs into the mobile phone arena. Investors, government and consumers shift quickly toward mobile communication because of convenience, affordability, and accessibility. The table on the following page illustrates the surprisingly large penetration rate and the very impressive annual growth rate in Central American countries.

This development means that the new technology is received with much more ease than in already existing well-established communication markets. This process has been helped quite a bit by the surrounding countries of Brazil, Venezuela and Mexico, as seen in the table on the following page.

I got a glimpse of how much Guatemala's telecommunications had changed in 2006 on a reporting assignment on deforestation in Petén. On the top of an excavated Mayan pyramid called El Tigre, one of three pyramids in a remote archaeological site deep in the Guatemalan jungle of Mirador Basin, I rested my legs weary from hiking 27 miles in 90 degree heat. I was barely able to raise my head enough to see someone holding up a mobile phone. Josué Guzmán was one of the Guatemalan archaeologists I was accompanying into this ancient Mayan city and he was sending a text message to his girlfriend.

"In Guatemala we're very connected," he told me. That's when I started to believe that mobile phones and the developed telecommunications industry in Guatemala were one of the reasons for this interconnectedness. It gave me faith in mobile technology as a tool for journalism and democratic development.

At that moment I imagined what news would look like if everyone who had a mobile phone or at least access to one, could send, share, distribute and report events they witnessed via a mobile phone to a website and also receive that information. I soon realized that long after the asphalt and pavement ends, the mobile phone networks in Guatemala extend deep into the mountains, with 99.7 percent penetration of mobile service in a country with an estimated population of more than 14 million in 2009, according to the World Bank Development Indicators. In 2007, the Superintendencia de Telecomunicaciones (SIT) registered 4.7 million more mobile users, indicating that 9 out of every 10 Guatemalans own or have access to a mobile phone. Much to the surprise of many of its Central American neighbors, Guatemala's telecom sector is one of the top four in Latin America, according to Fundación 2020 consultant Mario Marroquín Rivera. This figure contrasts with high-speed Internet access at only 7.7 percent and highly concentrated in large urban areas.

In 2001, Appalachian State University anthropologist Tim Smith traveled to Guatemala to research social movements and democracy among indigenous communities. "I had Mayas asking for my cellphone number and pulling out their flip Motorola when in 1997 and 1998 I had to get on a bus and show up to their houses and that was the way to get in contact with anyone," said Smith, who is currently traveling in Guatemala studying post-war Maya activism and electoral politics. Smith believes all this texting, blogging, and buying of smartphones will lead to big changes.

"Part of me wants to say something along the lines of the use of mobile phones and now online networking sites for democratic participation and mobilization in this election coming up is probably akin to the rise of print capitalism in Latin America," he observed.

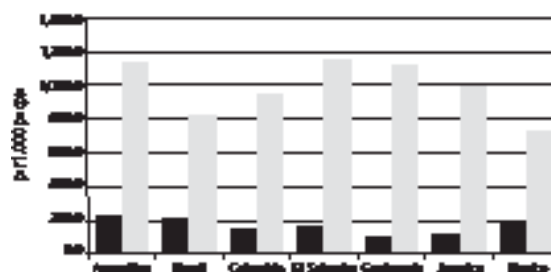
Smith believes Guatemala should be seen as a model in the use of this technology in the upcoming election in Au-



**Mobile penetration and annual growth in Central American countries—September 2007**

| COUNTRY     | PENETRATION | ANNUAL GROWTH |
|-------------|-------------|---------------|
| Belize      | 53.3%       | 14%           |
| Costa Rica  | 31.9%       | 1%            |
| El Salvador | 65.8%       | 51%           |
| Guatemala   | 61.4%       | 47%           |
| Honduras    | 46.3%       | 80%           |
| Nicaragua   | 40.2%       | 42%           |
| Panama      | 72.4%       | 29%           |

Source: <https://www.budde.com.au/Research/2008-Latin-America-Telecoms-Mobile-and-Broadband-in-Central-America.html>

**Latin America's fixed line telephones and mobile telephone subscriptions: 2009**

Sources: Euromonitor International from International Telecommunications Union/World Bank/trade sources/national statistics

gust 2011—in particular the use of these tools by ordinary citizens who are using the Internet and smartphones and blogging to get vital information out. “Mayas are sitting in Mayan-owned and operated Internet cafes blogging in Maya and texting; it was unimaginable ten years ago! It has the potential to shake up the election and not lead us to another 1999 result.” Mobile phones lessen the urban-rural dichotomy, allowing communities to organize themselves.

News organizations such as Emisoras Unidas, Radio Sonora and *El Periódico* provide breaking news via text or SMS alerts and ask listeners to contribute news, comments and traffic reports that are often read out on-air. During a major four-hour electrical blackout that affected 17 departments in October 2009, people texted in their messages to radio stations that were reading them out loud while listeners tuned in via their \$10 mobile phones bought at the local market.

For the National Movement of Radio Stations—representing 20 of the 22 departments and 168 radio stations—mobile phones are vital tools for airing local broadcasts in indigenous languages. In late January I witnessed about two dozen community radio stations’ volunteers crowding around a speaker to broadcast live from their mobile phones to their communities from Guatemala City’s Congress. Every few minutes they would translate by phone into their community’s language, and then put the mobile phone back to the speaker. On the other end was the station volunteer put-

ting the mobile phone the radio reporter had called on to the microphone that was connected to the radio transmitter and the message was broadcast live. It was their version of the “one to many” model, and their mobile phones were the intermediaries making that possible.

Some municipalities such as Mazatenango and Chinaulta use Twitter to deliver local news and events. Guatemala City sends out traffic alerts throughout the day to Twitter and users also contribute news about protests, blockades and construction on the roads. Mobile phones also provided a trail during CICIG’s investigative work in tracking the truth about the murder, later uncovered as a plotted suicide, of Rodrigo Rosenberg.

Twitter in Guatemala only works via online access or other enabling applications. As more smartphones are sold—including the recently introduced Android-powered models—more people are able to browse and use mobile phones beyond just telephony. For example, anyone can buy a mobile phone in Guatemala without a plan, deposit or credit, pre-pay *saldo* or funds, and sign up for unlimited WAP by texting 805 “wap.” For about 60 cents daily, that person can browse the Internet and have unlimited access. That’s cheaper than texting and MMS.

This trend in Central America falls in line with the trend in the rest of the world. The next two billion Internet users will be people who make less than \$4,000 a year, according to Don Derosby of Monitor GBN. “It’s not about the network, it’s about the cheap mobile device,”

he stated in his report on “The Evolving Internet: Driving Forces, Uncertainties and Four Scenarios to 2025” at UC Berkeley’s School of Information in 2010. “That future is already here, maybe unevenly distributed, but here.”

The numbers above clearly show that penetration and growth are rising in Central America, and are making some people in Latin America, like Mexican businessman and media mogul Carlos Slim, extremely wealthy. The region welcomes information services that are transformative because they provide a quantum leap for disadvantaged individuals, enabling them to participate in governance, to gain an economic advantage, to transmit culture, to create literacy and to make the unattainable, attainable.

*Kara Andrade is an Ashoka fellow working in Central America. Previously she was funded by the U.S. State Department to implement a mobile-based citizen journalism website called HablaGuate. She was the community organizer for Spot.Us, an open source project that focuses on community-funded reporting. She graduated from the University of California at Berkeley with a Master’s in Journalism and has ten years of experience in nonprofit development, public health and community organizing. She has worked as a multimedia producer and photojournalist for Agence France-Presse, France 24, the Associated Press, the San Jose Mercury News, Contra Costa Times and the Oakland Tribune.*

# La Silla Vacía

## Eight Ways the Internet Changes the Way We Think about the News

BY JUANITA LEÓN

IN 2007, DURING MY NIEMAN YEAR AT HARVARD, I decided I wanted to start an interactive website, one that would probe Colombia's power structures. As I started telling my colleagues about my idea, the most frequently asked question was, "What's the business model?" I still don't have a real business model, but *lasillavacia.com* has become the fourth most consulted source of information for opinion leaders in Colombia.

Too much has been written about how the Internet is changing the face of journalism. Journalists are spending way too much time thinking about the business side of our profession, exactly the only thing we know very little about. We are not trained to think about how to make money; we do not have the skills to do it, nor the interest.

And while we either break our heads thinking about the business side or panic about the impending end of our profession, the essence of journalism is changing dramatically. The narratives, the sources, the relationship to the audience, the production systems are no longer what they used to be. Not even the concept of news. And this is something about which we journalists might have something to say, because I think that the future of journalism will be marked by art and technology.

At La Silla Vacía, an investigative blog on politics in Colombia I created two years ago, we have made it our goal to think about where journalism should head and to try to move in that direction. The business part is still something we have to think about but we have an Open Society Institute grant and I'm an Ashoka-Knight Fellow, which means part of my salary is taken care of for the next three years, so we can spend some



Juanita León conducts an interview for La Silla Vacía.

time doing journalism.

We've covered stories from corruption scandals to profiles of who's who in Colombian politics. La Silla Vacía anticipated the Constitutional Court's decision to overrule the law that would have allowed President Uribe's second reelection and became a must-read during past elections because of its scoops.

The first thing we realized when we started La Silla Vacía is that the Internet does not only change the distribution of the news. It also changes the way we think about the news. Below are eight ways in which we now think about news at La Silla Vacía.

### 1. RAW INFORMATION IS THE STORY.

Described in very simple terms, a journalist usually interviews several sources, reads documents, experiences the place of action (when all the reporting is not

done over the phone), processes all that information and writes a piece. At La Silla Vacía we still do that, but we have also discovered that sometimes raw information is as appealing as a processed story, and we may use it as a story in itself. We have a section called La Movida, where opinion leaders have a password to sign on to the page and answer the "question of the week" in 1000 characters. It is an opportunity for users to have direct access to what leaders think without the mediation and interpretation of the journalist. At the same time, at La Silla Vacía we publish documents as raw information, with little notes similar to a post-it with some explanations, but letting the document speak by itself. Or we cover judicial proceedings via Twitter, simply transmitting what is going on with no interpretation.

We are also trying to build interesting databases and offering a database as the story in itself.

## 2. THE CONTEXT IS THE STORY.

As Jean François Fogel said in “20 comments about the cyber giant <http://www.letraslibres.com/index.php?art=12197>,” “the news in cyberspace is not an item that’s hidden, but a bit of information or a fact that someone rescues from the avalanche of information” (“La noticia en el ciberespacio no es algo que se oculta, sino un dato o un hecho que alguien rescata del caudal de informaciones”). At La Silla Vacía we are convinced that context is not only useful background information of news but the news itself. Offering the systemic knowledge to users about the topics discussed, putting together all the bits of news about one topic in a single story, becomes the news. We have also created Topical Trends, a site on the main political issues so that users can follow the contexts they are interested in more easily.

## 3. TRANSPARENT JOURNALISM: THE PROCESS OF MAKING THE STORY IS ALSO THE STORY

Colombia novelist Gabriel García Márquez used to say that if you wanted to learn how to write, you had to understand the ‘seams’ of the story, how it was done. We have applied that concept to La Silla Vacía and in several very special stories we not only tell the story but show the whole reporting process. We publish all the documents we used, the notes we took, the FOIAS (Freedom of Information Act information) we obtained, every raw piece of information that helped us build the story. In that way, users can read the story at two levels, evaluate our conclusions with the reporting they are based on, and also use the documents for their own purpose. This gives us more credibility.

## 4. THE NEWS IS A COLLECTIVE STORY.

At La Silla Vacía we are convinced that social networks are the base of the new media. The information is created and distributed by many-to-many. We therefore try to create the conditions necessary for users to generate useful informa-

tion, to distribute it, to fact-check it, and to complete it. We post the stories we are working on on Facebook, asking for new sources. We open up a debate around the stories in our forum link and then we post the stories we write on Facebook-related groups to nurture them with our new information. We see La Silla Vacía as a node that feeds from several networks, which at the same time are fed by La Silla Vacía. And we really treat our users as part of our staff. They give us ideas, write stories that are edited by our audience editor, follow up on questions by other users and work on suggested story ideas. At La Silla Vacía, news is the result of a collective work.

## 5. THE REAL-TIME STORY.

Just as important as offering the contextual story, we are convinced that immediacy is key. We cover many stories in real time using Twitter, Cover it Live, and U-stream. Probably as a consequence, most of us have become voyeurs. Readers (or readers/news consumers?) want to see what is going on, without any mediation from journalists. Just see the stream of life going on. At La Silla Vacía we have applied that concept to cover legislative sessions in Congress when the approval of a key law is pending; we have covered live important trials; we have created the conditions for users to interview important politicians in real time and get their answers in video.

## 6. THE NEWS IS AN IMMERSION EXPERIENCE.

Half of our audience grew up playing video games. Our goal is to offer them, in a couple of years, the possibility of having an interactive experience in the news: to offer them the possibility of being the virtual protagonists of our stories, to experience the dilemmas of policy makers and to ‘intervene’ in the story with their choices. We are following closely the developments of people like Nony de la Peña, the USC Annenberg researcher who has become a pioneer of immersive journalism with games like *Gone Gitmo* that recreates life at Guantanamo in Sec-

ond Life, because we are convinced that this is where journalism is heading.

## 7. THE TOOLS ARE THE STORY.

At La Silla Vacía we have come to understand that tools are sometimes the story. Applications such as Urtak, a tool that allows users to formulate binary questions and to answer them as a random survey, tell a story in itself. With our webmaster, we are trying to develop or to personalize tools that already exist because we are convinced that news is also produced in the interaction of users with specific information with the rest of the community of users.

## 8. THE STORY IS THE AGGREGATED AND CURATED CONVERSATION ON THE WEB.

What happens in cyberspace has become almost as important as what happens in real life. Cyberspace is the new public space where the debates are going on. Curating that conversation is a key role of an Internet journalist. At La Silla Vacía we monitor those conversations all day and aggregate them in a Twitter space called La Silla Dice, offering the links to the most interesting pieces of information. By reading the links of the day, you get the story of the day.

*Juanita León is the owner, founder and director of [lasillavacia.com](http://lasillavacia.com), an investigative political blog in Colombia. She is a 2007 Harvard Nieman Fellow and a Columbia Journalism School graduate. She is the author of *Country of Bullets*, about war in Colombia.*





# El Faro

## Online Media and a Response to Violence **BY CARLOS DADA**

**EL FARO GOT ITS START AS AN ONLINE MEDIUM** in San Salvador in 1998. El Salvador had just emerged from 12 years of a cruel civil war. The 1992 peace agreements, signed between a rightist government (and its army) and a leftist guerrilla force (the FMLN), marked a new beginning for the country, with guaranteed political participation for all parties in the political spectrum and a new set of institutions to start a new democratic process.

In this context, the media found themselves in a totally new situation. An entire generation of journalists—used to working in the rightist confines of a restricted press—was soon replaced by young, inexperienced reporters right out of college.

As such, two sons of exiles, Jorge Simán and I, returned to El Salvador to start a new medium that would be honest and fresh, treating its public like intelligent people.

Because of our lack of resources to start a print medium—rather than a visionary perspective—El Faro began as an Internet operation. We had no money to pay reporters. Also, since the Internet at the time was almost nonexistent in a poor country like El Salvador, it took us a while to earn a place among Salvadoran media.

Now, El Faro is well-known both in El Salvador and internationally. And El Salvador faces a different and escalating situation, a security crisis spearheaded by organized crime.

Thus, in January of this year, El Faro inaugurated *Sala Negra*, a section dedicated exclusively to the coverage of violence and organized crime, but in long formats. We intend to publish in-depth stories and investigative pieces, as well as that most Latin American of genres: the chronicle. We will also produce photoreportages and documentary films.



Photographer Donna DeCesare portrays how El Salvador has gone from civil war to gangs.

This initiative comes after months of reflection. We—El Faro co-founder Jorge Simán and I—became convinced that journalism's only morally valid answer to the security crisis in El Salvador is precisely through long formats, which require the application of both journalistic and academic methods to understand what is happening. Only that contextual understanding can explain the crisis to our readers.

Ever since its inception in April 1998, before Google was born, El Faro has been growing constantly, experimenting with new forms and searching for different ways to tell compelling and relevant stories. The *Sala Negra* is just one component of El Faro, but one that tries to find different ways to explain the crisis of violence that goes beyond the usual way of reporting on daily body counts.

Several articles in this issue of *ReVista* focus on the situation of violence in Mexico. However, Central America is now confronting one of its most difficult moments

since the armed conflicts that made headlines worldwide in the '80s. This time, a different kind of violence threatens the stability of the region: organized crime in the form of gangs and drug cartels.

For the first time since the end of the armed conflicts, the world begins to see Central America once again as a crucial part of the criminal and political turmoil of Latin America.

Today, the northern triangle of Central America (El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras) is the most violent part of the world, with homicide rates up to 70 per 100,000. This only worsens a politically unstable situation, with Daniel Ortega's authoritarian government in Nicaragua; the aftermath of a coup d'état in Honduras and the long-scale infiltration of the Guatemalan state structures by organized crime.

While El Salvador is politically more stable than its neighbors, the country is experiencing a deep economic and social crisis. There is mounting evidence of

the participation of law enforcement officers in organized crime. In addition to the seemingly unstoppable problems of gangs, crude violence, drugs and arms-smuggling activities, extortion and vendetta killings facilitated by an extremely high impunity rate, the country now directly faces the incursion of Mexican drug cartels already present in neighboring Guatemala and Honduras.

### THE FIRST YEARS

Our new section is very much in keeping with our history and our ideals. When we first started, journalism students, full of dreams and passion, came to us and built a newsroom where open debate and self-criticism became—and still are—the best ways to grow and learn from each other. This attitude enabled us to build a strong brand identity—one that is now reflected in the Sala Negra.

We knew from the beginning that we didn't want to compete with mainstream media. At a time when Internet gurus all over the world advised that we should go for short and late-breaking news, we insisted on long pieces published weekly. Again, we acted on what we wanted to do, rather than on some strategic vision of the future of online media.

Somehow our stubbornness paid off. Our readers found in our exclusive coverage, our in-depth stories and our narrative efforts an identity they liked, and they began to follow the website regularly. El Faro started to earn respect, prestige, and many more readers. We can attribute this success to publishing articles that others preferred to ignore, revealing facts the government tried to keep hidden and running stories about powerful people nobody else dared to touch.

For the first seven years, everybody involved in the production of El Faro worked on a voluntary basis. We were not successful selling ads and we didn't have a proper business plan. Internet penetration in El Salvador was by then around 10 percent; the advertising market had no faith in the Internet and no will to place an ad in a medium that was critical of the establishment.

But during those seven years we also had the chance to train a whole generation of Salvadoran journalists (and watch how, after a while, they left for mainstream newsrooms to continue their professional careers while finally earning a salary).

In 2003, a pre-electoral year, we launched a special project to cover the presidential elections. We published our mandate: we are not covering campaigns but the electoral process. Thus, we caught the attention of a couple of international agencies; for the first time, we had money to hire three reporters and a photographer for more than a year. They became the first people who ever received a penny from El Faro.

Since then, we have designed several multimedia projects and stimulated debates on issues of politics, immigration and violence with support from other organizations. We have increased both our sales and other sources of revenue. This has allowed us to expand our newsroom to more than 25 employees, producing materials across different platforms such as photography, radio, video, text, multimedia, books, DVDs, and conferences. Our newsroom is for the most part made up of people who had their first journalistic experience at El Faro many years ago. They have come back with much more experience, hunger and passion. And they are now training a new generation of journalists.

### DEMOCRACY AT STAKE

It is often said that there is no democracy without independent media; but the opposite is also true: there are no independent media without a democracy. Today, the democratic processes of the Central American countries are at risk. The levels of violence, impunity and victimization are alarmingly high, and citizens demonstrate, in poll after poll, less hope and more inclination to support other types of regimes if they can guarantee safety and a decent living. Democracy, they say, has not been able to satisfy those basic needs.

The problem, of course, is that demo-

cratic institutions have not been able to deliver a better life for citizens. Even though we have registered great achievements since the end of the armed conflicts, the status of institutions in Central America has regressed in most cases and stalled in El Salvador, the healthiest country in that context.

We strongly believe that independent media play a crucial role in demanding accountability and pointing out what is not being done right in the state institutions. Thus, we put a strong emphasis on investigating corruption and abuse of power.

But we also believe that independent media should help strengthen a middle class and its values, opening spaces for public discussion and debate. In searching for knowledge and understanding, the media provide intellectual tools for citizens to better understand reality and make decisions.

For such media to thrive, it is not enough to have these convictions and good journalists and editors to put them into practice. A good public is also necessary. We have a very demanding readership that has pushed us to constantly improve our work; a passionate readership that shows a much higher loyalty and sense of belonging than that of the mainstream media, constantly providing us with feedback through every possible way.

As we face new challenges, we will continue putting our imagination at the service of our journalism; that is, experimenting with new narratives and creating new projects that we think may help toward the construction of a better society with happier human beings.

Nowadays that vision requires even stronger dedication. Hard times lie ahead. But it is precisely in such moments that our choices, and the work we do, can be more important.

*Carlos Dada is the founder and director of El Faro. He received the 2010 Latin American Studies Association Media Award for the excellence and social relevance of the online publication.*

# Investigative Journalism

CIPER Chile **BY MÓNICA GONZÁLEZ**

IT WAS THE END OF THE YEAR 2006. SIX YEARS of intense effort to create a newspaper to break the duopoly of the written media in Chile were coming to a close. *Diario Siete* (*Seven News*), which I founded and directed together with one of the best journalist teams in the country, closed its doors for lack of sponsorship from private companies and the state.

Frustration had overtaken the team members. After having worked inhumane hours giving the best of themselves, they ended up unemployed. A defeat for those of us who had battled together with so many others to recover a democracy without confrontations, preserving the few spaces where we could use our only weapon: telling the truth despite intense repression.

For this reason, there was no justification, under the rule of democracy, for state organizations to privilege the same communications media they had supported during the dictatorship with advertising money—the indispensable oxygen that they denied us despite the high quality of our widely-recognized informative work.

This situation brought a group of editors from *Diario Siete* to sit around my desk at home to look for decent jobs that would allow us to survive. We were trying desperately to preserve a part of the team we had forged with so much care and conviction. And it was there that the dream began to take shape. It was born around a desk in my home, sharing a coffee with a group of journalists who longed to be able to extend their best talents to the public by providing truthful information and reporting.

We thought of a media where investigative journalism was the main dish,

where the pertinent information that affects and determines our daily lives was a priority, and where professional rigor was an obligation. Without any political blinders, without censorship and definitely without self-censorship. Without remaining silent in exchange for publicity. A dream. For some, a crazy dream.

Álvaro Saieh, one of the most important businessmen in Chile, didn't think it was so crazy. He is the main stockholder of COPESA, one of the axes of the information duopoly mentioned earlier.

Saieh had financed 50% of *Diario Siete*, aware of the need to introduce more diversity in the media, and he was sorry to see it close. I think he had even become so fond of the paper that every day he provided information that was not to be found in other media, that was entertaining, and that gave us our identity. And one day in March 2007 in his large office in Santiago, while asking that I be

realistic about my dream, he took out a piece of paper and started writing down numbers. Finally, he took out his calculator, added them up and said, "Let's do it, I'll finance it. I like this!"

Thus Chile's only Center for Investigative Reporting, CIPER, was born. We started on May 1, 2007, with four journalists sitting around that same desk in my house, this time joined by journalist and Columbia University professor John Dinges, who accompanied us in the beginning, enthusiastic and full of ideas.

The strict truth: it was a weak bet. We weren't even clear about what our format would be. We thought that what wasn't on paper didn't have an impact. Six months later, we acquired a new identity when the Chairman of the Board of COPESA, Jorge Andrés Saieh—Álvaro Saieh's son— took the initiative and created our first website to disseminate our investigations.

**A young girl strolls past an occupied zone with a street mural.**

PHOTO BY MÓNICA GONZÁLEZ





Without publicity and without advertising, the investigative website got off to a timid start. The journalists in Chile responded as if it were an artisan fraction of the media, one of those they derogatorily call “alternative,” and from which they could plagiarize without repercussions. And they copied us shamelessly without attribution to the authors of reports that took more than a month of work to put together, and which these third parties disseminated as if they were their own. This is what happened with the investigation entitled “Robber Cop: Delinquents in Uniform,” which revealed the high percentage of corrupt police officers.

Not even when we published the unprecedented investigation called “Journey to the Depths of Pinochet’s Library,” which revealed an unheard of and absolutely unknown facet of the former dictator, was there public recognition of our work. But we had a lot of readers on the web. Cristóbal Peña’s library story later received the prestigious prize of best report of the year from the New Iberoamerican Journalism Foundation (FNPI): an award no Chilean had received before.

The media silence continued until March 17, 2008, when we uploaded an investigation to our portal that represented the work of three journalists over a period of more than two months. In the report we detailed the multiple irregularities of the public bid for the technological, communication, and computer program platforms of the Civil Registry, awarded to the Indian company Tata Consultancy Services BPO Chile S.A., which would be in charge of administrating the entire Chilean public database (a US\$80 million contract).

The next day the Judicial Minister annulled the public bid; the following day he removed the staff officers of the Civil Registry, and three days later he gave CIPER’s information to the Public Ministry to initiate the judicial investigation. For the first time, executives of a private company—the invisible partners of corruption—were implicated in an official investigation. The scandal obligat-

ed other media to cite us as their source. And from then on, we had the respect of the media.

We were sure about our path. That investigation won many prizes. And many more have been added since. However, it is not the awards and distinctions that are important to us, rather, it is having an impact on public policy and the public debate. A good investigative product not only supervises state and private power, it also influences the public agenda by forcing changes in public policies that violate or prejudice citizens and demanding the utmost care of public funds.

This is what happened with our investigation on the irregularities in housing development that the violent February 2010 earthquake left exposed.

In these three years and eight months of life we have preserved this line of reporting. We have put under scrutiny the private security business that recruits delinquents to guard homes and businesses, as well as the parallel water market in northern Chile, where this vital element is bought and sold for millions to meet the demands of mining companies while farmers and the local population suffer from the transactions. We have also put the areas of Santiago occupied by drug traffickers on the map—areas where neither state institutions nor the law dare to tread. And then there is the groundbreaking X-ray of the clans who control the drug market in the capital city. We have not forgotten about retail company labor abuses or sexual abuse perpetrated by priests. Both issues have touched on sensitive areas of the economic powers that be.

For a year we investigated public hospitals and demonstrated how doctors deny the right to adequate health care to millions among the poorest with their poor medical attention—while in the afternoons they give their best skills to those who pay for their appointments at private clinics.

One key instrument for broadening our investigations has been the recently implemented Public Information Access Law. We have become experts in its

good use and addicted to it. In fact, our petition for information about a nonprofit foundation started by President Sebastián Piñera (the Future Foundation), filed when he was a presidential candidate, was qualified by the Transparency Council of Chile as one of the ten requests that led to legal precedent in this area. As a result, the balance sheets of all nonprofit institutions have been declared public information.

Finally, we finished 2010 by publishing a book that compiles CIPER’s twelve best investigations, which rapidly rose to the top ten on the non-fiction bestseller list in the country. The book was a product of a multifaceted collaborative effort between the Universidad Diego Portales and CIPER to strengthen investigative journalism in Chile and in the region. We have multiplied the number of visits to our website from all over the world, principally from Latin America. We would not have been able to grow in impact and greater production without the financial support of the Open Society Foundation and the Ford Foundation, which believed in our product from early on.

Today, as we are about to become a nonprofit foundation, we are starting a new era. We are full of projects, all of which have the same purpose: to produce high impact, quality investigative journalism that serves society and provides diverse information in a country where practicing good journalism is a constant challenge.

***Mónica González** is the director of CIPER ([www.ciperchile.cl](http://www.ciperchile.cl)). González has frequently given workshops around Latin America. In 2006 she received the Career Tribute Award by the Fundación Nuevo Periodismo Iberoamericano (FNPI) and in 2010 the UNESCO/Guillermo Cano Award for Freedom of the Press. She also received the 1988 Louis M. Lyons Award for Conscience and Integrity in Journalism, awarded by the Nieman Foundation at Harvard University, and the 2001 Maria Moors Cabot Prize for outstanding reporting on Latin America by Columbia University.*



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# FOCUS ON MEXICO

Mexico today is a very dangerous place for journalists and their media. It's more than a matter of the staggering numbers: more than 60 Mexican journalists have been murdered since 2000. Fear creates an atmosphere of terror and self-censorship, or, as Alfredo Corchado so eloquently notes: it's midnight in Mexico.

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# Midnight in Mexico

Press Challenges: A Personal Account **BY ALFREDO CORCHADO** PHOTOS BY DANIELA REA

**MORE THAN 60 MEXICAN JOURNALISTS HAVE** been murdered and dozens more have disappeared since 2000, more than 30 in the past four years.

Every journalist in Mexico—sometimes even I, an American journalist—wakes up to ask the following questions: How far should I go today, what questions should I ask, or not ask, where should I report, or what place should I avoid? And what photos should I take, or ignore. Should I wear a wig, pretend to be a taco or an ice cream vendor at the crime scene so that I can disguise myself as I try to do my job, which likely means reporting on the latest decapitated body on the streets, or a hanging from a bridge in downtown Juárez, Cuernavaca, Nuevo Laredo or Monterrey.

Should I even answer my cell phone? Because I know that if I do the person calling me is surely a man who calls himself Boots, Rooster, Chicken or Rabbit, a spokesman for the drug traffickers. And once I answer that phone I have no leverage to negotiate. It's either follow an order or face death, or the killing of a relative, a son, or daughter because that's the reality in Mexico for a journalist today. The intense questioning, the doubts and the anxiety and stress have many of my Mexican colleagues and us on edge.

My colleagues and I are witnessing the bloodiest period in Mexico since the 1910 Mexican revolution and the biggest threat to Mexico's national security, its young, fragile democracy and freedom of the press.

Mexico today is among the most dangerous places to do journalism in the world, right up there with Iraq, Russia and Somalia. This is especially true for those of us who cover the U.S.-Mexico border, once a frontier for Mexicans seeking new opportunities and new beginnings.

In the border city of Ciudad Juárez, across from El Paso, more than 200,000 people have fled the chaos, many to the United States. Today, parts of the border region are increasingly silent. Our beloved border is now paralyzed by fear and chaos and stained by bloodshed. More than 36,400 people have been killed since Dec. 2006, nearly 8000 in Ciudad Juárez alone since January 2008.

Whatever danger we U.S. correspondents face pales in comparison to the dangers faced by our Mexican colleagues. I can call my editor, Tim Connolly, this very second and say, Tim, I don't feel safe anymore and he'll say, get on the next flight out. That's not the case for Mexican journalists.

Let me explain it to you this way: the difference between my Mexican colleagues and me comes down to this: citizenship. I'm thankful and grateful to have parents who many years ago dreamed big and were determined to give my five brothers—Juan, Mario, Francisco, David, Mundo and two sisters—Monica and Linda—and me the chance to dream and achieve. We migrated from a poor community in Mexico to follow the crops in this country when I was just six years old. Along the journey, from Durango to Juárez, California to Texas and back to Mexico, I was able to obtain a little blue passport that says I am a citizen of the United States of America.

As imperfect as our judicial institutions are, I have perhaps a naïve, but unwavering belief that if something is to happen to me, there would be consequences to pay. That our newspapers, our media companies, our colleagues would stand up and demand answers and justice, that our deaths wouldn't become just another number. Someone would seek justice.

Three years ago as I prepared to celebrate an award from Columbia University—the Maria Moors Cabot prize—I got a call from a trusted U.S. intelligence source who said “I have raw intelligence that says the cartels will kill an American journalist in 24 hours ... I think it's you. Get out of Mexico now.”

I called my U.S. and Mexican colleagues who were preparing a celebration dinner for me that evening and said, there's a death threat and I think we should cancel dinner. Dudley Althaus from the *Houston Chronicle*, insisted, “If they're going to kill you, he said, they will have to kill us, too. So come on over and have some tequila.” Subsequent solidarity included a protest letter from the U.S. ambassador and editorials in some U.S. newspapers.

My Mexican colleagues can't say the same thing. They don't have that kind of solidarity among themselves; they don't share that trust with their own editors, less so with their own government.

Today, the vast majority of the killings in Mexico, whether you're a woman in Ciudad Juárez, or a cop, or your average citizen, end up as crimes unsolved, unpunished—“crímenes no resueltos.” More than 95 percent of all crimes in Mexico go unresolved.

I dreamed of being a foreign correspondent not because I wanted to live in some exotic land, but simply because I wanted to return to my homeland. I ached for my roots, language and culture. I often ask myself questions I thought I had finally resolved. Am I what I believe

**On the contents page, the wife and 9-year-old daughter of Jaime Najera, 43, mourn in Ciudad Juárez. Opposite, Elías Ramírez, 32, of Morelia, Michoacán, was killed on his motorcycle January 1, 2009. That day, he didn't say goodbye to his son Elías because he had caught him smoking. His son plunged into a bipolar disorder and a desire for revenge.**





I am? Do I belong to the United States, this powerful country built on principles of rule of law, yet still faced with contradictions—the insatiable appetite for guns, cash and drugs, or do I belong to Mexico, the country of my roots, where my umbilical cord is buried, where we use nationalism and patriotism to more often than not mask our corruption, our poverty and inequality?

The hyphenated complexities of being Mexican-American create a confusing feeling of being in-between. For me personally, this also instills a sense of a higher responsibility to share these stories, especially now when so many reporters have been forced to censor themselves or face death.

As such I strive to understand that when you cover Mexico, particularly the U.S.-Mexico border, nothing is black or white. There are only shades of gray; that to understand these stories you must go deeper, and be able to see and distinguish between shades of gray, understand that not everything is as bad, or good, as it seems.

And that there are always, always, always many sides to this story.

Take for instance, the story of young men who no longer dream of going to the United States to toil in the fields, but who see opportunity in becoming hit men in Mexico, earning as little as 250 to 1500 pesos, the equivalent of \$22 a hit to \$130 a week. As the old iconic Mexican song from José Alfredo Jiménez, “la vida no vale nada” — life in Mexico is worth nothing.

We’re talking about a whole new generation of children affected—numbed by the daily violence around them and teens from both sides of the border who embrace a new lifestyle and a new saying:

“Prefiero vivir cinco años como rey, que 50 años como buey.” I prefer to live five years as a king than 50 as an ox.

Or consider the young Chicano gang member who now uses the same immigration routes his grandparents used decades ago to embrace a new life, a chance at an opportunity. Today, gang members, hand in hand with powerful Mexican

cartels, use the same route to distribute drugs in more than 250 U.S. communities where Mexican cartels have an influence. Their role model is a thug from Laredo, Texas, with the name Edgar Valdez Villarreal, better known as La Barbie, a Texas high school football player who rose through the ranks as a hit man to become the most notorious American in a Mexican cartel. The heroes of my time had names like César Chávez, or JFK, or Martin Luther King.

How did things get so bad in Mexico? The answers are complex. Demand for drugs in the U.S., the lure of easy cash, the widespread availability of guns, especially high-powered weapons, smuggled from the United States.

And on the Mexican side it had to do with ignoring a reality: corruption, complicity and greed. For too long, the two countries blamed each other and as they did, Mexico slowly descended into darkness. Corruption grew like a cancer within the government.

Today, Mexico’s conflict is really a war within. It’s about a country trying to redefine itself, become a nation of rule-of-law, but without a clear path, or mandate. Few can question whether President Calderón had any other choice but to take on organized crime, which had reached the upper echelons of power. But whether or not he had the right strategy and the right people is a question that will haunt him, Mexico and us for decades.

The spillover into the United States isn’t so much about violence, but about an exodus of Mexico’s most talented people. And you’re seeing that in enrollment in universities across the country. People migrating today aren’t just nannies, or people picking your blueberries in Maine, or caring for your cows in Vermont or working in restaurants in Boston. No, we’re talking about well-educated professionals, people who used to create jobs—people who now fear being kidnapped, or extorted by criminal gangs.

My biggest concern is that Mexico has yet to reach bottom and nobody yet knows where that bottom is, or what it may look like.

I stumbled onto the story seven years ago when after a brief period at our Washington, D.C. bureau I was assigned a story to investigate who was killing so many women in Juárez. There I discovered the role of organized crime with the help of police in kidnapping and killing some of these women, with no consequences.

After Juárez I discovered Nuevo Laredo, where Americans were also being kidnapped, and a new paramilitary group, the Zetas, members of the Mexican military partly trained by the U.S. government, was terrorizing society.

Suddenly, I was immersed in stories about U.S. agencies mishandling informants, or how U.S.-trained Mexican soldiers had gone rogue, or the deep corruption inside the Mexican government.

I had left Mexico for Washington in 2000, convinced by U.S. officials that the election of an opposition government, the end of 71 years of one party rule, signaled the automatic birth of democratic institutions. Far from it, organized crime took advantage of a power vacuum. With greater ease they bought off entire police forces, politicians, beginning with mayors and local governments. And then they also bought off journalists. The cartels became de-facto governments. It was no longer the threat of *plata* or *plomo*, silver or lead. It was our way, or six feet under.

These cartels are very sophisticated about mastering the message. Today, media members serve as spokesmen. Cartel spokespeople will call reporters or edi-

**Top: Sergio Adrián Hernández, 15, of Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, was killed by a bullet fired by the Border Patrol June 7, 2010, while he was playing near the Río Bravo. His sister Angélica, pregnant with twins, tattooed an image of his face on her arm; his niece Angi waits for him to return every afternoon. Bottom: Jaime Nájera, 43, Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, was killed just a few blocks from his home by three bullets in his stomach and one above his eyebrow. His wife and nine-year-old daughter were waiting for him at home. His daughter fights with the neighbors when they say her father was killed because he was “bad.”**







**Érika learned about the death of her husband Óscar García, 30, of Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, on the television. They described him as the victim of a vendetta. He left three children: Carolina, 10, Karina, 6, and Ernesto, 3. Carolina writes messages to her father on a piece of paper in which she says, "Send us the consolation we need because we can never accept your death with resignation."**

tors and dictate what should or shouldn't be covered in that evening's newscast, or in tomorrow's newspaper. Imagine working in a newsroom where you don't know if your colleague is the brave journalist, or a spy for a cartel.

Last year, *El Diario de Juárez* asked: what do you want from us? The message was aimed, the editor said, at the drug traffickers. It was a way of expressing their frustration, and sense of impotence of living in the shadow of organized crime.

I'd want to believe that the message was also meant as a wake up call for civil society, because until civil society demands more from wealthy media mo-

guls, journalists will be poorly trained and paid, something that will make them vulnerable to the threats of organized crime.

Earlier this year, Nieman curator Bob Giles wrote a piece of advice that ran in the *New York Times* editorial page:

To the Editor:

The brave journalists reporting on the Mexican drug cartels under the most fearful circumstances should remember a cardinal rule of journalism: no story is worth dying for.

Another friend, and one of the best former Latin American correspondents, Doug Farah, constantly reminds me, "no color is worth dying for."

I couldn't agree more with Giles and Farah. Far from preaching that we all be journalistic cowboys, I would argue that we must find a way to find a balance: fear-versus-silence. We must find a way to tell the story, and not let fear be the deciding factor, don't allow fear to become

the ultimate editor who decides whether or not we pursue a story.

Last year, I went to the city of Reynosa, Mexico, with some colleagues to confirm rumors of running gun battles on the streets in broad daylight. We heard parents were keeping their kids home from schools, staying home from work, others were fleeing in droves to Texas.

Because of a media blackout, some were resorting to Twitter, YouTube and Facebook to share news about when it was safe to go outside, or whether to drive down specific streets. The big story on the front pages of newspapers in the area that day? The price of onions going up.

I'm not saying fear is wrong. I actually think feeling fear is a powerful force. Fear is a survival skill. If you're not scared you become reckless. Fear forces us to stake stock of our lives and reminds us how much life means to us.

So what we cover and how we cover this story is a very personal decision.

I became a 2009 Nieman fellow because I was scared, because I questioned

whether what I was doing was the right thing. When I returned to Mexico I felt numb, separated from the story because I realized I didn't want to put my life on the line anymore.

That sentiment changed on January 31, 2010 when 16 people, most of them teens, were gunned down. When I heard the news that Sunday morning, I felt, like many people, well, they're probably gang members. So we went to check it out and soon discovered that most were students, athletes, sons and daughters of parents who had dreams for them; parents who told them don't stray too far from home. Celebrate your friend's birthday across the street, so you can be close to home.

The hit men were wrongly tipped off that the party was for a group of rival gang members. So they stormed in and lined up and killed 13 of the 36, while friends, or brothers and sisters hid in closets, others hid underneath the bodies of their friends and siblings.

I will never forget the day of the funeral, the sight of a dozen hearses on that street, the sight of coffins, the wailing from parents, friends, brothers and sisters. I'm grateful that it was a rainy day because I felt so angry that I was able to mask my tears with raindrops. And on that sad, gray, rainy morning I broke my silence and found my voice again.

*This article is based on a speech delivered by Alfredo Corchado on receiving the Elijah Lovejoy Award at Colby College.*

**Alfredo Corchado**, Mexico City bureau chief for the Dallas Morning News, is a 2010-11 Visiting Fellow at the David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies and a 2009 Nieman Fellow. He is currently working on a forthcoming book *Midnight in Mexico: A Personal Account of My Homeland's Descent Into Darkness*.

# Under Fire in Mexico

'They Hit Us' **BY JAVIER GARZA RAMOS**

IT WAS PAST MIDNIGHT, IN THE FIRST MINUTES OF Tuesday, August 18, 2009, when my cell phone rang with a call from the newsroom of *El Siglo de Torreón*, the daily in Torreón, Mexico, where I work as editor-in-chief. I thought it was a routine call about a breaking story. In a way it was, but the news value was the least of my concerns.

"Ya nos pegaron," said the frightened voice of the night editor. "They hit us."

My heart sank. A "hit" might mean many things, the worst being a kidnapped or murdered reporter. In this case, it had been shots from an AK-47 fired at the building from a corner across the street. The bullets hit the customer entrance of our advertising department, which was closed at that hour.

The burst of gunfire had gone unnoticed in the printing department, where the presses were rolling at full speed, but it broke the quiet in the newsroom, where editors were putting the final touches on the next day's edition. At least 20 rounds had been fired, and the bullets pierced

the steel curtain that closed the entrance at night, shattering six windows and putting holes in walls and furniture.

Because the shots were fired at a closed entrance, nobody was hurt, and the only people inside had been well protected by the building itself.

When the night editor called to say "they hit us," he didn't need to explain who "they" were. Mexican media have been under attack by organized crime for the last five years, killing 10 journalists, including one in Torreón. Five more would be killed in the months following the attack against *El Siglo*. Criminals had carried out attacks with grenades or gunfire against the headquarters of news organizations and were forcing the media to impose self-censorship.

The next day we were flooded by calls from Mexican media and national and international press associations expressing sympathy and asking what had happened.

Organized crime is what happened. In the previous two years, Torreón had



**Bullets fired at the headquarters of *El Siglo de Torreón* struck the customer entrance. Nobody was hurt in the attack on August 18, 2009.**

quickly descended in a spiral of violence linked to the fight among the drug cartels and the offensive against them launched in 2006 by President Felipe Calderón. The number of homicides, kidnappings and street shootouts was on the rise. The proximity of La Laguna region to the border made it a zone coveted by drug cartels. A turf war had erupted.

The face of Torreón is very different from what it was even in the summer of 2006, when I returned to take over the *El Siglo* newsroom. I had spent the previous 12 years working in Mexico City, Washington and Austin. Even in 2006, with the battle among the drug cartels raging across Mexico, Torreón was still the quiet city where I had grown up, rapidly growing as an agricultural, transportation and industrial hub in northern Mexico.

Drug trafficking had been seldom in the news, but that doesn't mean it didn't happen. As far back as the 1970s, La Laguna had been a main crossing point for drugs from the Pacific ports to the United States. The region is the crossroads of northern Mexico, halfway between Mexico City and Ciudad Juárez, and the Pacific coast and the Texas border.

Stories about drug trafficking and cartel activity in La Laguna popped up every now and then, but after 2007, the intensity took everyone by surprise. However, attacks against journalists in the region had been unheard of until 2009, when the events we had seen happening in other parts of the country hit home.

After the attack against *El Siglo*, officials from the federal government and the Coahuila state government pledged cooperation and a full and swift investigation. But the promises were taken with a grain of salt, because most previous attacks against the media remained unsolved and were quickly forgotten.

Barely three months earlier, in May, Eliseo Barrón, a reporter at *La Opinión* (our main competitor) had been kidnapped at his house. When our lead police reporter learned of the kidnapping, he thought the criminals would go after more journalists; he was resigned to being kidnapped that same night. They did

not get him, but Eliseo Barrón's body was found the next day in an irrigation canal.

After Barrón was killed, I huddled with my deputy and the city editor to review our crime coverage and find ways to protect ourselves. We had done that before, and as a result, toned down the stories on violence. Fully aware that we did not have government protection, we felt that the only way to protect ourselves was to avoid stepping on anybody's toes. We did not resort to self-censorship, but decided to pursue a very limited, basic reporting on stories about organized crime, sticking to official information without conducting our own investigations.

After the attack on our building, we reviewed our recent crime coverage, searching for clues about the motive for the hit. But we had published only police reports on murders and shootouts, taking care to omit the names of the cartels and avoid the appearance that we were "keeping score" in their fight to control La Laguna. We didn't find anything that might have provoked a criminal group. The Coahuila Attorney General told us the most likely motive had been that a group wanted to "heat things up," calling the attention of the Army and the Federal Police to the region presumably to hit a rival cartel, and believing that the attack on a newspaper would do the trick. But the investigation soon went cold, and we never knew what really happened.

In late 2006 and early 2007 the region came under fire from cartels seeking to control the lucrative routes and the profitable local market for drug selling. Homicides spiked dramatically, from an average of one every four days in 2007 to one every two days in 2008, to one per day in 2009 and almost three daily in 2010. Shootouts breaking out in major avenues infused the population with panic. Commerce fell; the once active nightlife shut down. Innocent bystanders began to be added to the toll—a four-year-old boy caught by a bullet during a firefight between the Army and an armed group; a 25-year-old engineer in his house, hit by a bullet from a shootout next door. And dozens more: roughly one

out of every ten of the more than 1,500 homicide victims in La Laguna since 2007 have had no connection to organized crime. They're "collateral damage," as the government calls them.

That toll of innocent civilians rose sharply in 2010 as the battle turned vicious and the violence more widespread. That year, armed groups attacked two bars and a private party, shooting people at random. Ten people died in an attack in January, another eight in a hit in May, and 17 more in July. All were without any connection to the drug cartels. In June, hitmen (*sicarios*) attacked a drug rehabilitation center, killing 11 people because some of them had been drug dealers from rival gangs.

The impact in the newsroom was a mix of shock and powerlessness. We rushed to report the wave of violence, but the possibility of an attack and the lack of protection from the authorities prevented us from going into the depth and breadth called for in a story of this magnitude, with its dramatic effect on the population.

Our limits were put to the test in late July. The Zetas cartel posted a video on YouTube showing a local cop being interrogated by hitmen at gunpoint, confessing that the *sicarios* that attacked the bars in Torreón were inmates at the jail in neighboring Gómez Palacio, who had been let out by the warden to carry out the killings. The inmates were associated with the Sinaloa cartel, and the jail was then taken over by federal authorities.

A few days later, while reporting the Federal Police presence at the jail, two cameramen and one reporter from two TV stations (Televisa and Milenio) were kidnapped. One of our reporters had been with them until 15 minutes before the abduction; when he returned to file his story, we sent another reporter to replace him, but pulled him from the scene as soon as we learned about the TV crews. For the next five days we did not send anyone to cover any story in Gómez Palacio, no matter how trivial.

As it turned out, the kidnapping had been a way for the Sinaloa cartel to black-



mail Televisa and Milenio into broadcasting interrogation videos of their own, in which police officers talked about links between local politicians and the Zetas.

After pressure from news organizations and press associations, and widespread international coverage, the Federal Police rescued the reporters and arrested eight people. But a dangerous precedent had been set: if a cartel doesn't like certain coverage, it can always kidnap a reporter to force his newspaper or TV station into running its own version.

The kidnapping also reinforced our strategy of doing basic reporting on violent episodes, and we found a way to make up for it with stories about crime statistics, the spike in armed robberies, the social and economic impact of violence, the testimonials of people living under its shadow, and the links between poverty, unemployment and crime.

But the incident had left a deep scar among journalists in La Laguna, dramatically underlining the threat. Our feelings were symbolized by the editorial that *El Diario de Juárez* ran in September after the murder of one of their photographers. "What do you want from us?" *El Diario* asked the cartels in Ciudad Juárez, addressing them as the "de facto" authorities of the city.

For three years, I had been thinking long and hard about what circumstances I would have to face for writing an editorial like that. But my thoughts were always private, quietly hoping that, as an editor responsible for the safety of *El Siglo's* reporters, I would never be confronted with that situation. Until now I have been spared, but other editors and reporters have had to face it, and maybe it's just a matter of time. In these days in La Laguna, a hit is always around the corner.

**Javier Garza Ramos** is editor-in-chief of *El Siglo de Torreón* in Torreón, Mexico. He studied in the Universidad Iberoamericana and the University of Texas at Austin, and has worked as editor and reporter for *Reforma* in Mexico City, and *Rumbo* de Austin.



## Juárez in the Shadows

A Blogger's View **BY JUDITH TORREA**

**IT IS TEN MINUTES BEFORE MIDNIGHT;** I've already reported on ten crimes in fewer than six hours. Today, fifteen people have died.

To remember the exact number of *muertitos*—little dead people, in the very particular journalistic jargon of Ciudad Juárez—I have to look at my notes. At times, I am at one crime scene for only fifteen minutes. I have to go rushing out to another "event." Ciudad Juárez is a sprawling city and it takes time to go from one place to another. It is a big and violent city, but one with a fierce blue sky and magical sunsets.

I am a journalist. And now I am a freelance journalist in a city that is categorized as the most dangerous in the

world. I do not always find a place to publish my stories, so my blog *Ciudad Juárez, en la sombra del narcotráfico* (Ciudad Juárez, in the shadow of drug trafficking) (<http://juarezenasombra.blogspot.com>) arose from my need to make all those stories public. Without having to wait for an editor. Without self-censorship.

My stories are not investigative reporting. They are features on daily life in this city, seen through my eyes. Publishing these stories in my blog helps me feel alive among constant death. It is my cry for justice.

**Children were witnesses to the crimes at Senderos de Pamplona.**

The hardest part is thinking about these events. I realize that the horror that many of my sources predicted (and many of these sources have now been murdered themselves) not only has been surpassed, but now a new ingredient has been added: Mexican President Felipe Calderón's so-called war against the narco, in the context of the struggle between the Sinaloa Cartel and the Juárez Cartel to take over the drug routes that extend from Colombia to U.S. consumers.

Since the war began, more than 7,300 people have been murdered in the city. Ciudad Juárez has become a militarized city. If before January 2008, it was poor, attractive women who disappeared, death has now been democratized. Merely being alive is dangerous.

The murders have left 10,000 orphans—children who run the risk of growing up to be paid assassins—*sicarios*—if the Mexican authorities don't take action.

I am a journalist and prefer to give voice to the voiceless. Hopefully, the portraits of the victims I publish on my blog help readers to reflect on the war; there is nothing else I can do. I can only report what I see. Here are a few excerpts from my blog.

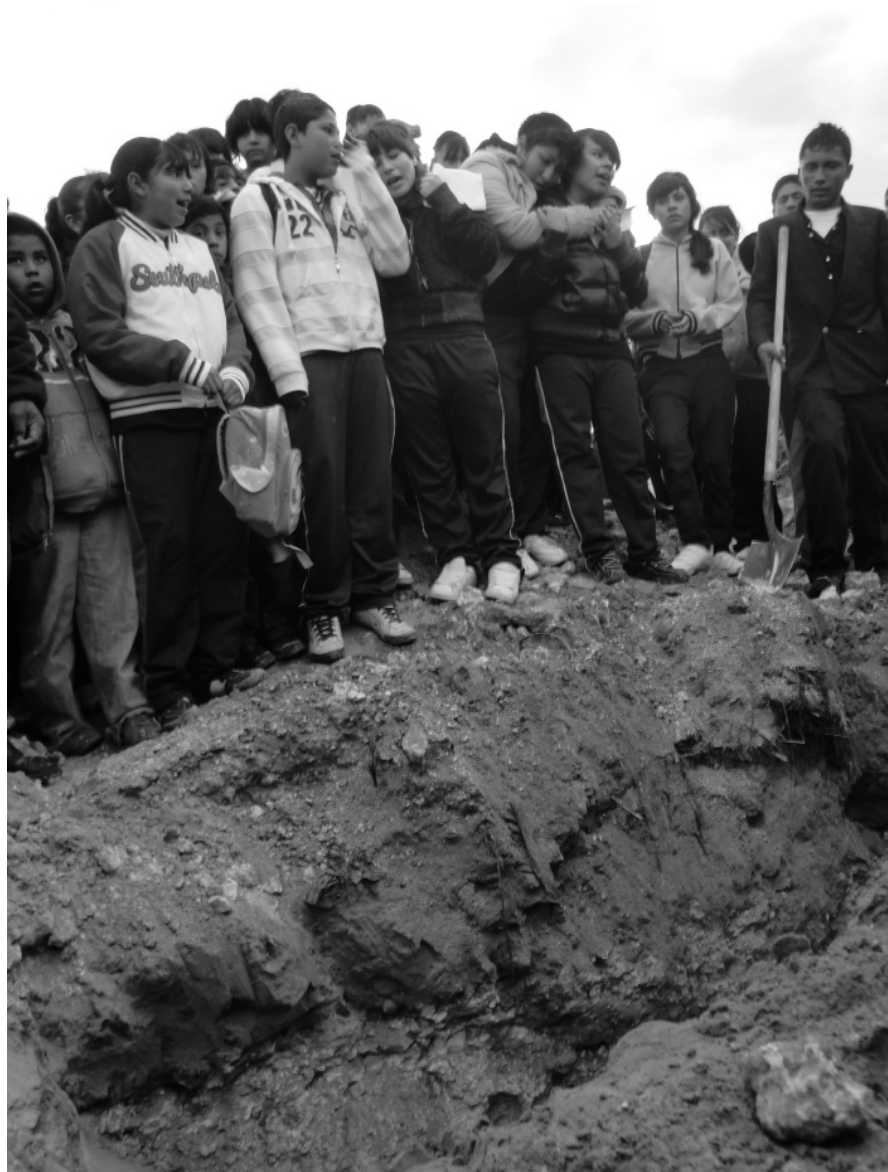
#### THE NARCOCORRIDO ANNOUNCING DEATH

A little after five in the afternoon on Wednesday, November 11, the radio of the municipal police in Ciudad Juárez was interrupted for a few seconds by a *narcocorrido*—a drug-related Mexican musical ballad.

I could not tell if this was a song preferred by the Juárez cartel or that of Sinaloa, two drug groups that are battling for control of this much-desired (codiciada) zone—and fight even on the police radio waves.

The only thing that I could be certain of was that death was approaching. Someone was going to be murdered. Half an hour later, the Senderos de Pamplona Street in a working class neighborhood became a spectacle of horror.

When I got to the street, one body was



Luz María Dávila mourns her only two sons in two coffins February 2, 2010.

sprawled by the side of a latest-model white Avalanche SUV; another inside a black Pontiac.

Some schoolchildren recounted details of the murders. They were the first witnesses; they were getting out of class when they saw an armed group of men with machine guns pursuing the two victims. (*continues on the blog*)

#### SEVEN DEATHS IN FEWER THAN SEVEN HOURS

He was called Junior, at least until an hour ago. Now he lies at his girlfriend's

door in the working class neighborhood of Lomas del Rey. The federal police have just arrived, although the body has been lying on the ground for an hour. Then the military and the municipal police show up. They are all looking at the body. Some are right up close. Others maintain a distance, like the two federal policemen who chat with two teenage girls sporting white skin, charming smiles and jet-black eyes.

Junior was 18. He worked alongside his father in a mechanic's shop, and all the neighbors said he was a good kid.

Today, out of the blue, a black Explorer SUV sped up, and Junior began to run. Another vehicle cornered him. They gunned him down.

Thirty-three bullet shells were on the ground, more than found in his body. Now he is one more cadaver—for many. For Marta, no; he is the eighth neighbor she has lost in seven months and in many of these cases, the gunshots have been heard; the body was seen lying in a pool of blood; the emergency number 066 had been called to ask for help.

“Can I ask you for help with something? I need a psychologist for my friend. Her 15-year-old son was killed three months ago. She can’t sleep; she doesn’t want to live,” she asks. She says

a la ban! Chuy, Chuy and no one else!” And then he hears the memorial shouts for those lying in the six other tombs.

Jesús Armando Segovia (“Chuy”) was 15, although on his white cross they listed him as two years older. He was an excellent student and sportsman. To the authorities, he was one more member of a gang.

For many, saying that someone is a gang member is an easy way to justify lack of legal investigation; only social or political pressure can galvanize the authorities into action, as happened in the case of the femicides. The justice system is severely flawed and impunity is rampant.

“Chuy” was one of 16 kids who were murdered Saturday at a student party,

she never thought would happen: being chosen a beauty queen.

Her daughters, three and four years old, began to tell her, “See, mommy, you are my princess.” And she would tell them that someday they would be princesses too.

She looks at the picture of the Virgin of Guadalupe she has painted in jail. She has been sentenced to five years in prison for possession of five kilos of marijuana. Sitting on her small bed, she expresses painful emotions through her large eyes. She did not want to see him, not in this fashion, in a coffin, his body tortured. And headless.

She did not want to see him, Iván Roque, her husband, murdered one day before his 30th birthday.

They offered to bring his body to the jail and to open the coffin for a few seconds so that she would be able to mourn him. But she thanked them and refused the offer. She wanted to remember him alive and whole. (*continues in the blog*)

## Hopefully, the portrait of the victims I publish on my blog help readers to reflect on the war. There is nothing else I can do. I can only report what I see.

nothing about herself—a 46-year-old woman who has lost eight neighbors to violence in as many months. (*continues on the blog*)

### CHILDREN BURYING CHILDREN

I don’t know how to begin to tell you what I experienced today, Wednesday, February 3.

The 40-year-old gravedigger Manuel Cano is also speechless. His tear-filled eyes betray the depths of his emotions. Like Juárez’s intensely blue sky that has suddenly turned a fierce gray with heavy rain during much of the day.

And Cano has seen many coffins. More than 6,000. But the last ones were the hardest to take in all his ten years working at the cemetery. “Ciudad Juárez is being massacred. It is a ghost city. There’s no future here,” he explains as he shovels dirt on another grave, one of seven in a row. The gravedigger continues, covering the same graves that he has dug. Meanwhile, he is listening to cheers like “Chuy, presente!!! We love you! A la bio,

and one of seven who were given their final farewells on the same street, in the same church and in the same cemetery. They were all neighbors.

Their friends buried them, children burying other children. They ranged from 13 to 19 years old, more or less the same age as the kids who were executed, converted by the violence of their deaths into alleged gang members and drug traffickers. The mourners were closer to being children than adolescents. You could tell that by the way they dressed, by their airs of innocence.

All these kids were still in school, studying hard, the only rays of light in the working class neighborhood of Villas de Salvárcar, where most people work in assembly plants. But hope has now been massacred in this militarized city.

### THE PRISON QUEEN

In April, six months ago, her image was published around the world. She was smiling. Then she was crying, tears of happiness. She had achieved something

### EPILOGUE

I live in this city that I have chosen. In a place where great deeds of solidarity take place while human lives are being snatched every single day, and the world only waits to see how more deaths there will be in my dear Juárez, where the blue sky turns into the ochres, oranges and red tones of magic sunsets—until they kill you.

*Judith Torrea is an independent journalist and blogger from Spain. She received the 2010 Ortega y Gasset Award, the most important journalism award in the Spanish-speaking world. At the time, she was the only foreign journalist living in Ciudad Juárez. She is the second blogger who has won the award: Cuban blogger Yoani Sánchez won it in 2008.*

The texts quoted in this article come from the blog: “Ciudad Juárez en la sombra del narcotráfico” (“Ciudad Juárez in the Shadow of Drug Trafficking”), <http://juarezenlasombra.blogspot.com>



# From the Ashes of Violence

## Building Justice through Journalism

BY MARCELA TURATI

*Ever since that afternoon when school-teacher Gloria Lozano stared at her only son riddled with bullets on an empty lot next to the bodies of twelve other young people, all victims of a hit squad—among them, a first-time dad embracing his infant—ever since then, neither she nor any of the other families of the “Creel martyrs” would ever be the same. In their struggle for justice, the families have blocked highways, staged marches, taken their message to radio stations, dragged cardboard coffins through the streets, interrupted government events, blanketed businesses with official posters offering rewards for gunmen’s arrest, corralled the governor, the mayor and whatever official they could get their hands on and, in a tactic that surprised even themselves, stopped a train carrying tourists to Barrancas del Cobre. For a long time now, they have been investigators. They now know who murdered their children. Now they want justice.*

*“We are not afraid; they have killed us already, along with our children,” shouts an angry Lozano, each time that she thinks of the possible consequences of her odyssey.*

**REPORTING ON THE CREEL MASSACRE IN THE** Mexican state of Chihuahua was a watershed for me in my weekly systematic coverage of the social effects of the violence in Mexico. Along with many of us Mexican journalists, I became a war correspondent in my own country, after the drug cartels and the Army turned it into a battlefield, a surge of violence many officially date back to 2007.

In the highlands community in the state of Chihuahua where the 13 youth were murdered in August 2008, I discov-

ered a new class of individuals—fearless and brave, with a burning desire to obtain justice. Their pain had forced them to break away from the pattern of victimhood that I had witnessed on other assignments: people paralyzed by fear, ashamed and stigmatized, frustrated by impotence.

Since that time of the Creel massacre, I have given myself the assignment of trying to discover in the midst of the horrors and tragedies those people who have the strength to organize themselves, to share their pain to heal others, who take to the streets to reclaim them for the citizens. Their hearts may be broken, their lives ruined, the coffins still reposing in the living room, but they find the strength to act, and I in turn must find the strength to honor these stories of courage in the midst of their grief.

It has not been easy. I have managed this kind of reporting only a few times. One must be able to observe closely and have a lot of patience. And, above all, one first must move through the difficult paths of one’s own paralysis, fear, impotence, fatalism, to touch much pain in order to denounce its causes, to improvise and even to make mistakes.

The cyclone of violence surprised us Mexicans, and journalists were not prepared. We were overwhelmed by the new codes of blood in which extermination is the goal, where fury is the message and is expressed through decapitated, carbonized, disappeared bodies, dissolved in acid, executed, tortured, massacred.

We tried to keep our focus on the social implications, rather than statistics, on protagonists, rather than victims. This type of journalistic coverage did not take place in a vacuum. Since 2006, before the explosion of drug violence, a group

of Mexican reporters became concerned with responsible journalism with human rights as its focus. Even before we had the slightest suspicion that Mexico would turn into a battlefield, we began to join together in what we later called the Network of Social Journalists, roughly equivalent to “Grassroots Journalists.”

We wanted to organize to develop our tools of investigation, good writing, information planning and new knowledge for the purpose of covering effectively for our media social-oriented themes such as health, education, human rights, ecology and migration—vital information that allows citizens to understand what is happening, but information that is often perceived by editors as a way of filling space. Political, judicial and economic stories, as well as entertainment and publicity, all take precedence over issues of social relevance.

In order to strengthen our work, we began to contact experts in social development and well-known journalists from other countries who were passing through Mexico. Without a budget of our own, we invited these experts to dinners or breakfasts in exchange for giving talks. The inevitable question we posed was how to focus on coverage on human rights issues.

Then drug violence began to escalate. In 2007, several of our group were sent to the battlefield. I was assigned by the magazine *Proceso* to cover Ciudad Juárez, the epicenter of Mexican violence, which since that time has become the city with the highest murder rate in the country. I confess that I—and several of my colleagues—did not even know the names of the various drug cartels who were fighting over turf. But the one tool that we did have was training to identify



**A mother remembers her son.**

the factors that were provoking violence in the society.

The emergency forced us to improvise coverage in the best way we could. However, we found it to be a complicated exercise fashioned day after day in the heat of each new emergency. We required constant training, education of our faculties of observation, learning to read accounts of trials, constructing a different discourse, overcoming fear and making sure that indignation and hope do not simply burn out. For a long time, we merely kept a body count that in the newsroom we dubbed the “execution meter,” the daily statistics of deaths that police reporters kept as evidence of the torment of blood.

Suddenly, the violence was so great that some of us reporters who had promised ourselves that we would never cover drug trafficking found ourselves at the

scene of bloody crimes, interviewing witnesses or survivors, attending funeral wakes, searching for facts about the victims with which to construct a skeletal obituary or reconstructing a massacre to “document the horror.”

But it got to the point that the pile of dead people seemed infinite, in which each massacre seemed just like the last one, in which six terrible pieces of news competed with each other for front page space. Coverage had to be conceived in a manner that would not just be reacting to events—just as we had conceived our socially-oriented coverage on health and education issues. It was the moment to seize the agenda, take it away from the violent ones who had set it, to give back a sense of life and dignity to the victims and power to the citizens. That is: to shed light on what is happening through the lens of human rights. That is what I

call journalism that denounces what is happening and announces what can be changed.

Thus, we began to describe the misfortunes of poor towns forced into the cultivation of poppies, the raw material for heroin. We covered the tragedy of “juvenile” (young people murdering other young people), the drama of towns with populations exiled by violence, the stories of prisoners tortured into confessing their guilt as hitmen, the surge in human rights violations. As we began to report on these situations, relatives of victims began to show up in the newsroom with photos in their hands, looking for family members who had been forcibly disappeared by the Army, the police, drug traffickers or for absolutely unknown reasons. Soon, these isolated visits became a flood of family members hoping to find information about their loved ones.



Mourning in Mexico.

The emergency forced us to beef up our training sessions. Through the journalists' association, we organized courses on the risks of militarization; on drug trafficking networks from cultivation to consumption; social themes that intersected with security issues; the experience of the Colombian conflict; how to interview children affected by the violence; how to protect ourselves and defend freedom of expression.

The government line considers the assassination of more than 34,000 Mexicans in this war a victory, alleging that nine out of every ten deserved that fate because they were drug traffickers. We refused to accept that explanation and kept on investigating; we are not toeing the government line of blaming the victims. We also refuse to be involuntary spokespersons for drug traffickers in waging a campaign of fear which they staged a macabre performance with the bodies of their rivals to instill terror and to deprive their victims of any remaining humanity.

At this point, several journalists decided to give the gruesome statistics a face, to rescue the histories of the dead, to learn their ages and what impact their absence had caused in their families, in

their neighborhoods, and each of us had to grieve (or at least to worry).

Certainly, there is a moment when the individual anecdote becomes so draining that readers are no longer willing to read about personal tragedies. This fact obliges us to shape our stories in a different fashion and piece together the individual tragedies so that they become a reflection of a social phenomenon.

*"Who has done their task?" asks the psychologist at the beginning of the group session. The students remained silent in their seats. She reminds them that their task is to give away the clothes of the dead person to advance the grieving process. Or at least to try to do so.*

*A woman in the audience comments that it freaks her out to give the expensive suits belonging to her son, a policeman known for his elegance and neatness, until he was gunned down. The woman's remark sparks a question from an elderly man who asks if it is bad to converse every day with the photo of his son who was murdered in the street. A worker confesses that she could not get herself to get rid of her husband's belongings because he was still missing, though*

*she did accept giving away her murdered son's possessions so that others could put them to good use.*

Grief therapy in Ciudad Juárez was the subject of my story of a religious collective's recently organized workshops to heal the families who had lost one or more family members. This served as a mirror, a painful one, which reflected the profound social damage caused by the murders.

During a year and a half, I had asked each one of the social organizations if they had created some sort of a support system for the families of the thousands of people murdered in the city, but they only replied that they had been overwhelmed by the violence. I discovered the grief workshops only when I saw a sign on the street inviting families to grief workshops in the church.

In every armed conflict, there is an abundance of victims and we need to find a way to explain how their suffering is a matter of concern for the entire society. From the beginning, thanks to the training we had received from our Colombian colleagues and because of our dedication to covering social themes, the reporters in our network made the decision to make the victims visible because those who commit the violence inevitably have headlines guaranteed in the media, as reporters are always keeping track of these violent crimes and the perpetrators are always the protagonists.

Facing the grief of others is always a delicate task, and it requires preparation, patience and time. On many occasions, those who have been victims of violence are too afraid to talk to journalists or they see reporters as vultures who prey on others' grief.

In such situations, we also seek to avoid portraying victims as defenseless people, lacking in options and rights. Instead, we must try to make these victims visible as protagonists, as able to take charge of their fate and, against all odds, as people who demand that their rights be restored or organize themselves to help others.

It required systematic reporting over



a long period of time to ferret out the citizens who are organizing themselves, who have lost their fear and resist their situation with dignity. In violence-torn Mexico, collectives of mothers in search of their disappeared children have sprung up; families have united in the investigation of the murders of their family members; students connect with others through Twitter to oppose the violence and artists take to the streets with the mission of recovering them as public space for citizens.

In reporting their activities (but at the same time making sure not to put these courageous people at risk), we have opened a window of hope in moments in which it seems there is no possibility of hope. With these types of stories, we hope to enable the population to recover its self-esteem, to seek out others to work together collectively and we provide a face to victims as individuals, who in spite of the tragedies, have not been defeated.

*The cost in lives lost to the violence has been so high that the sons and daughters of murdered people participate in almost every mundane venue from day care centers, to classrooms, to catechism classes to sports events. The so-called “orphans of the executed” are found everywhere, a collective that is all too easy to join.*

*Many have participated in group therapy. For them, organizations such as Casa Amiga have created a therapeutic atmosphere with a psychologist who, in the midst of guided relaxation, instructs them, for example, in these words: “Now, lying down like this, with your eyes still shut, with your body now relaxed, bring to your mind, the death of your dad, at what moment did you learn that he had been killed? Feel your heart beating? What did you feel then? What was the expression on your face when you got the news?...” When she leads them into a state of profound sleepiness, the therapist asks them to draw what they visualize and in their drawings, they depict hearts that have been cut into*



**Mother with a portrait of her son.**

*pieces, others wrapped in tears, and others wounded with deep scars. Then she suggests healing and they start to add band-aids, adhesive tape, tissues and little flowers into their drawings. They even manage to fix some of the scars that wound their souls.*

The story we wrote on therapy for children orphaned by the violence motivated sixty psychologists from Chihuahua to create a network of therapists devoted to alleviating the social pain caused by overexposure to violence, and two months later, these psychologists allied themselves with the recently created organization of families of the disappeared.

The creation of the two networks was a beacon of hope in the context of the desolation experienced in many regions of the country. The network of the families of the disappeared, together with human rights activists, exchanged legal and psychological tips, and strategies for political struggles. They discussed how to take cases to the international courts to continue on with their search and to obligate the Mexican state to investigate the disappearances.

In the same way that the internation-

al cartels had become internationalized, citizens found that through my coverage of their organizations in the news, they could exchange strategies for action and survival both domestically and internationally.

We journalists are key to this process of citizen empowerment. We make visible the actors who are protagonists for change and describe the strategies that have produced results. We can collaborate in helping people to overcome the paralysis of fear and we can provide tools for the construction of a different future.

*Marcela Turati is a staff reporter for Proceso magazine, where she covers human rights, social development, and the social effects of the narcoviolence. She is co-author of the book La guerra por Juárez (The War for Juárez) and author of the book Fuego Cruzado: las víctimas atrapadas en la guerra del narco (Crossfire: Victims Trapped in the Drug War), (Grijalvo), which discusses the social damage caused by drug violence during the Felipe Calderón presidency. She is co-founder and co-administrator of the Network of Social Journalists (Grass-Roots Journalists).*

# MAKING A DIFFERENCE

## Inheritors of History

A CONVERSATION WITH BARBARA FASH

**THE TWO SANDAL-CLAD TEN-YEAR-**old girls in bobbing ponytails might have been tourists or children on a school excursion. Instead, these enthusiastic youths were explaining the background of the Fragile Memories: Archaeology and Community, Copán, Honduras 1891-1900 exhibit, a collection of 19th century photos housed in the Municipal Palace in Copán Ruinas.

They are part of a team of nine girls and one boy, ranging from 9 to 12 years old, who are trained to show visitors around the exhibit. For these youngsters, it is a lesson in volunteerism and civic participation—but also in their own history and heritage. These images from the 19th century are their history, and Copán Ruinas is their town.

**WHAT MOTIVATES YOU ABOUT THIS PROJECT?** Developing this docent program has been a wonderful way to work with people that I've spent 30 years of my life with, that I've raised my children with. This project is all about them as a descendant community that is part of the photographic collection.

**HOW DID THE EXHIBIT COME ABOUT?**

The idea for the exhibit came about in 2006 when the Peabody Museum was

completing a 2 year NEH grant to digitize all of its glass plate negatives from the 19th century. The Copán negatives are the earliest ones, which prompted the Peabody Museum's Curatorial Board to ask me to consider making an exhibit about them. An important part of the Peabody Museum's mission is outreach to its descendant communities through exhibitions and collections research, so I agreed to curate the exhibit, but with a return request to them that the museum would donate the exhibition to the town of Copán after it came down.

**WHAT DID YOU HOPE TO ACHIEVE WITH THE EXHIBIT?**

I hope that the exhibit will enable people from Copán to reconnect with their history and visualize the community the way it was in its infancy, and instill in them a sense of civic pride. Reflecting on its history and development will hopefully help people work together to consider what positive future directions they want for their town and move to implement them. The exhibit underscores how the town and the archaeology have always shaped each other, and this process continues today. These young docents are the keepers of the knowledge. We hope



Young docents in the museum

more can be done with the school programs and teachers, not just from Copán, but throughout Honduras.

**HOW DID THE YOUNG DOCENT PROGRAM DEVELOP?**

I first came upon a young docents program in the cultural center in Gracias, Honduras. Children were explaining the artifacts and the rooms dealing with agriculture and food-making. I thought it was very compelling to see youth so involved and proud of their past.

I took the idea back to Copán. Flavia Cueva, who runs a bed-and-breakfast in Copán and has taught primary school in the United States, was recruited as the project's promoter. She worked with teachers in the area, who in turn asked for essays from interested students about why they would like to work as docents. Students who wrote the best essays were then interviewed for qualities such as self-assurance.

The docents work from

4-6 p.m. after school, with different children working each day in pairs. We've taken them to the ruins and to classes with students in the Harvard Archaeology summer field school. Our archaeology project's local Community Liaison, Karina García, also spent many hours working with the young group. We're trying to get them beyond reciting the information by rote—to think about their past, which is also their future.

There is a long way to go in developing this program. And there is a lot I am learning too, about how these young people look at their culture and their history.

*Barbara Fash is the Director of the Corpus of Maya Hieroglyphic Inscriptions Program. She is the author of The Copan Sculpture Museum: Ancient Maya Artistry in Stucco and Stone (Peabody Museum and David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies/Harvard University Press).*

## Guatemala: An Urban Focus

A REVIEW BY KIRSTEN WELD

**Securing the City: Neoliberalism, Space, and Insecurity in Postwar Guatemala**, by Kevin Lewis O'Neill and Kedron Thomas, eds. (Duke University Press 2011, 240 pages)

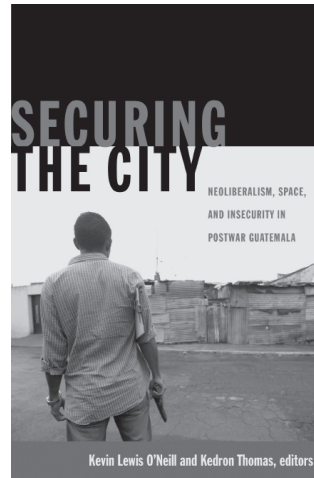
Guatemala City is a difficult place to live, much less to love. Smoke-belching buses clog its arteries, lurching past shantytown-lined ravines, down once-grand boulevards, and through the hardscrabble neighborhoods of the working poor, against which the glitz of the Zona Viva stands in cruel counterpoint. Commuters rush home at dark to avoid becoming statistics: the homicide rate, at 109 per 100,000, is one of the highest in the world. One edition of the travel guide *Lonely Planet* bluntly includes, among its top five highlights of Guatemala City, “leaving.”

It's not only tourists who've fled the city but academic researchers too, who often prefer to base themselves in the highlands where the breathtaking volcano views come smog-free. As the editors of *Securing the City: Neoliberalism, Space, and Insecurity in Postwar Guatemala* point out, most scholarship on Guatemala has focused on the rural life of the Maya, neglecting the capital city and its rich history. In this new volume, editors Kevin Lewis O'Neill and Kedron Thomas

attempt the worthy task of addressing this gap.

Taking a page from New Left theorist Raymond Williams, the contributors to *Securing the City* unpack varied spatial imaginaries of both urban and rural Guatemala in order to dissect the crises provoked by the country's neoliberal turn. The volume's finest essays—those by Deborah Levenson, Manuela Camus, Rodrigo Véliz and coeditor O'Neill—illuminate the corrosive effects that the growing polarization of wealth, the deterioration of family and communal ties, and the privatization of public space have had on a country still reeling from decades of bloody state repression. Finally, the editors argue that, far from being discrete spheres, urban and rural Guatemala are inextricably linked—by commerce, by culture, and above all, by failed post-war expectations.

“Living the peace,” one essay suggests, “has proven elusive.” To find out why, *Securing the City's* contributors examine what they call the “practices of neoliberalism.” Through this series of snapshots—of the informal economy, of the private security industry, of urban gentrification, of rising neo-Pentecostalism, of generational change, and, above all, of the pre-



cariousness of everyday life in Guate—O'Neill and Thomas themselves attempt to “secure the city,” to comprehend and theorize it. They emphasize that a new neoliberal order is to blame for the capital's ills and extremes, an order in which “a new set of practices and strategies...privatize what would otherwise be the state's responsibility” for guaranteeing Guatemalans' health and welfare. As the essays show us, citizens have improvised a wide array of coping strategies—informal-economy entrepreneurship, migrating for security guard jobs and more.

It's hard to dispute that structural adjustment policies and the opening of markets to a rather cynical interpretation of “freedom” have wrought devastation not just in Guatemala but across the Americas. Nonetheless,

parts of *Securing the City* feel thin; the book's focus on the practices of post-war neoliberalism leads it to largely neglect a serious analysis of the hobbled Guatemalan state or its pre- and post-1996 continuities. For example, the editors define neoliberal practices as “the broad-scale transference of state functions to private citizens” with particular emphasis on the privatization of security in the post-war period. Yet private security forces, some run directly out of the offices of the National Police, existed even during the worst of the war years, to say nothing of the paradigmatic example of security outsourcing—the mass conscription of hundreds of thousands of Maya villagers to serve in Civil Self-Defense Patrols (PACs). Speaking of the police, they win only the scantest of passing mentions in this book. How can we understand the privatization of postwar security without looking seriously at civil policing and at the thus-far failed attempts at police reform?

And while the editors critique the fact that the neoliberal state cannot keep its citizens safe, counterinsurgency survivors will recall that the pre-neoliberal state didn't do a particularly good job of protecting Guatemalans either. In fact, the Guatema-



lan state has long been kept weak by design, undermined by tight-fisted oligarchy and, more recently, by parallel powers linked to military and narcotrafficking interests. If this neoliberal polyarchy fails to keep a social contract with the Guatemalan people, it is because the democratic transition of the mid-1980s was engineered by the military as a counterinsurgency strategy—it was designed to save face before an international chorus of lenders and human rights critics, not to save Guatemalans. It is no

and for this it merits praise. It would be a stronger book if it included contributions on some of the most integral features of the post-conflict landscape: narcotrafficking and parallel powers; the challenges of postwar policing; the proliferation of foreign-funded NGOs; or perhaps the adoption industry, that controversial commodity chain connecting not only country to city, but city to world.

That said, one book cannot be expected to stand in for an entire field of inquiry; other writers must rise to the

## Citizens have improvised a wide array of coping strategies to deal with everyday life in Guatemala City.

historical accident that the state's civilian institutions are as weak, underfunded, and vulnerable to infiltration by organized crime as they are. And because the state has betrayed the vast majority of its population over and over again throughout the past two centuries, it is little wonder that citizens turn to ad-hoc, "privatized" survival strategies in order to carve out some semblance of functional lives.

The editors of *Securing the City* are to be applauded for working to shatter common narratives that pin the blame for Guatemala's urban violence on "delinquents," urban gangs, rural lynch mobs, or other such bogeymen. The work also dismantles the imagined boundaries between city and country,

city's formidable challenge. Guatemala City's is a "beauty of witches," as Paul Theroux writes, and despite the capital's violence and inequality it remains a vital, fascinating locus of Central American life past and present. "The city is not dead," as Levenson notes in her contribution to *Securing the City*, and though its epitaph has been written many times over, it is the responsibility of scholars, activists, and policymakers alike to refrain from consigning it to a premature death.

**Kirsten Weld** is the Florence Levy Kay Fellow in Latin American History at Brandeis University. She is currently completing a book manuscript on the 2005 discovery of Guatemala's National Police Archives.

## Indigenous Lands

A REVIEW BY THEODORE MACDONALD

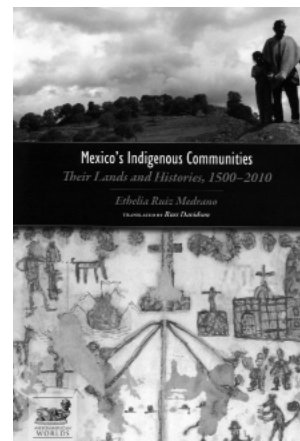
### Mexico's Indigenous Communities: Their Lands and Histories, 1500-2010,

by Ethelia Ruiz Medrano,  
(University Press of Colorado, 2010).

*Mexico's Indigenous Communities: Their Lands and Histories, 1500-2010* lives up to its ambitious title.

In only 291 pages of dense near-encyclopedic history, Ruiz Medrano orders an enormous corpus of facts and arguments to provide a Post-Conquest review of indigenous land loss and imaginative efforts to control it. The lengthy bibliography includes original findings from Seville's Archive of the Indies, builds on major writers on Mexico's social and economic history, cites comparative cases from other part of Latin America, and the details the author's ethnographic research of contemporary land struggles in Guerrero and Oaxaca. The text does not engage the reader in an "easy read," but rather, provides a reference work that will be useful for years to come.

Running through this history are two threads. One is the persistent indigenous effort to engage Spanish and, later Mexican, authorities in negotiations over land and principles of land rights. Here the author's emphasis lies in



interactive indigenous agency with State agencies, not simple resistance and certainly not passive acquiescence. As the 510 year history progresses, the Indians, of course, lose nearly all of their land and most control over its resources. However, the period is punctuated by dignified arguments substantiated by primordial land claims. The manner of this indigenous argument—primordial evidence expressed symbolically and visually—is the book's second thread. The Pueblos use codices, maps, and other symbolic visual devices, in many cases obtained by the author, that serve, as Ruiz Medrano consistently emphasizes, to "negotiate" land rights with local authorities and the Crown.

These are not simple reactions or spontaneous protests, but patterned exercises of agency to demonstrate land claims.

The Indians did, after all, lose most of their lands, but the book illustrates an imaginative flow of persistent legal actions and changing concepts of law. While the author appropriately lays the blame for land losses on the locus of power—Spanish and, later, Mexican governments—the text is pleasantly free of blame on the current *bête noir*—neoliberalism—which has replaced “dependency theory” as the “explain all” that often masks the complex interrelations and understandings that provide a modicum of indigenous agency.

The first two chapters review legal and land tenure history of the 16th to 18th centuries. They provide a detailed review of, on the one hand, a “clash of civilizations” in which, at least from the perspective of the Spanish Crown, there is basic respect, illustrated by complex legal arrangements created to order relationships. Likewise, we see arguments accepted and based on indigenous history and geography, as illustrated by the complex codices (which would be far more impressive if the original colors had been printed). However much the negations are imbalanced by the Christians’ invocation of God-given powers through such tools as Papal Bulls, there is a sense that, at the highest levels diplomacy as well as power is at work. On the other, somewhat more soiled, hand, local level Spanish behavior was a simple series of efforts to increase personal wealth, exploit indigenous labor, and obtain

permanent land holdings. It is easily and cynically argued that the Crown’s relatively benevolent behavior was little more than an effort to weaken the increasing powers of the colonial elites. With that in mind, the book could have been improved through more discussion of the many legal and philosophical debates that took place in Spain during this period. Nonetheless, Ruiz Medrano presents the progressive demise of formal Colonial land rights in a manner that parallels Charles Gibson’s classic study “The Aztecs Under Spanish Rule” while taking the reader far closer into specific cases and, again, showing how communities continued to document individual cases through the ingenious use of dramatic codices and maps as evidence.

The Colonial period introduced diseases that may have been the most devastating to Mexico’s indigenous population, but Ruiz Medrano’s next chapter shows that the revolutionary and liberal 19th century was perhaps the most destructive to the social fiber and lands that held that cloth together. Much of what occurred was seen as liberating the Indian from his childlike protected status. Though realized in a somewhat schizophrenic and on/off manner, the Pueblos were provided with opportunities for local governance and a degree of local legal control. But Ruiz Medrano emphasizes that “...as a result of legislation passed first by the Cadiz Cortes government and then by successive liberal and conservative national

governments, [the Indians] lost the protection the monarchy had given them by virtue of their special juridical status. With the abolition of a special Indian court, the Indians were henceforth placed on the same legal footing as other social and ethnic groups, divested of the protection of a “paternalistic” monarchy—however much such protection would have been confined to the realm of legislation.” 19th century Indians were now independent “citizens,” not subjects clustered in communities. But while they could no longer be thrown to the lions, they were left relatively unarmed to face the wolves. Again Ruiz Medrano chronicles imaginative efforts to overcome that weakness, but the outcome proves little substantive indigenous self-determination in arenas such as land and land rights.

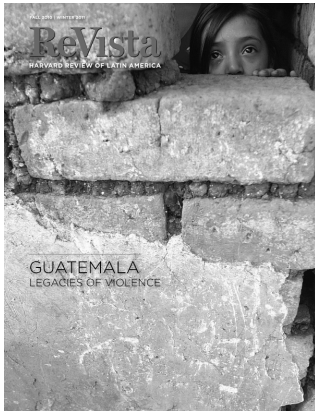
The most insidious freedom of the 19th century granted to the Pueblos was the freedom from themselves, particularly with regard to what was seen as suffocating and anachronistic customs of land tenure. Communal lands, with their inability to alienate individual plots, were inconsistent with the liberal Enlightenment notions of freedom to “improve” one’s individual self. So communal lands are provided with legal mechanisms whereby individuals can convert usufruct holdings into private properties. As with the US Dawes Act of that time, the individual acquired not simply his own lands, but he would help to break up his neighbors’

lands as well. The idea that such new freedoms could be used simply to shift lands to non-indigenous peoples was certainly not lost on the Pueblos, and Ruiz Medrano’s long review of their efforts to retain Ejidos is testimony to indigenous resourcefulness. The final chapter reviews two cases—one from Guerrero and another from Oaxaca. Each features a strong local indigenous figure that draws on history and visual imagery to inspire local citizens.

What comes across in this richly detailed book is the sense that while great losses have occurred, they have not come at the price of indigenous dignity nor the destruction of the many arguments made though careful manipulation of indigenous symbols. As such, the symbols are useful negotiating tools as well as a mirror onto which indigenous peoples project a sense of sense of self and history.

**Theodore Macdonald** is a Fellow at the University Committee on Human Rights Studies, and a Lecturer in Social Studies at Harvard University. In 2009, he co-edited the volume *Manifest Destinies and Indigenous Peoples (DRCLAS/Harvard University Press)*. He also undertook the ethnographic research and subsequently served as witness for the plaintiff in the precedent-setting 2001 indigenous land and natural resource rights case, *Awas Tingni vs. Nicaragua*, heard, and determined in favor of the community, before the Inter-American Court of Human Rights.

# READER FORUM



## GUATEMALA LEGACIES OF VIOLENCE

Dear June,

I'm writing now with regard to the most recent issue of *ReVista*, "Guatemala: Legacies of Violence," which is just absolutely spectacular. It's visually beautiful, the scholars are perfectly chosen, and the range of topics covered gives a truly—painfully—complete picture of the challenges confronting Guatemala today.

It happens that in the spring semester I am teaching a survey course in Modern Latin American history here and had designed the course to be capped by a single-nation case study — Guatemala—using Victoria Sanford's *Buried Secrets*. I also have designed the course with a focus on the uses of history in contemporary writing and education. So of course I am now going to rework entirely the last weeks of the course to incorporate this issue of *ReVista* as a key teaching resource.

I'll assign students to read the online versions of the articles, but I also want

to structure some in-class exercises around particular groups of essays. So I'm writing to enquire about the possibility of obtaining multiple copies of the issue to use in class with my students. I'd really love for students to be able to experience this publication in its physical, print form: both because the design is so superb and because this is a case where I think the total impact of the issue is even greater than the sum of its parts.

LARA PUTNAM  
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR  
OF HISTORY  
UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH

*Editor's Note: We welcome requests for classroom use of ReVista as long as supplies last. Payment is welcome, but not required.*

Dear Editor,  
The Guatemala issue of *ReVista* is wonderful and I want to congratulate you and Edelberto Torres-Rivas on it. During 1982 to 1990, I was a member of the Kalamazoo group of CISPES, a Central America solidarity organization that worked on human rights issues not only in El Salvador, but also in Nicaragua, Honduras and Guatemala. We were quite involved with a U.S.-based Guatemalan human rights organization, educating citizens about what was happening in that country. In fact, one summer we went to 5,000 houses in Kalamazoo talking to residents and handing out literature about U.S. foreign

policy in Central America. I still have posters on my office wall from that time, including one about the 40,000 disappeared in Guatemala.

PROF. HENRY COHEN,  
DIRECTOR, INTERNATIONAL &  
AREA STUDIES PROGRAM,  
KALAMAZOO COLLEGE  
(MA, HARVARD, 1962)

The fall/winter 2010 *ReVista* offers an extensive number of articles on Guatemala that mainly focus on the violence that we suffered during the guerilla warfare and the present situation of violence. Due to the importance of these articles, and mainly the piece "Indigenous Rights and the Peace Process" by Santiago Bastos, I submit my comments for your consideration:

1) The implication that present violence in Guatemala is an inherited consequence of the period when we had guerilla warfare, or that it is racially inspired is not correct. Present violence in Guatemala is primarily due to the lack of institutional authority on the part of the government to establish a professional police force and justice system to capture and punish delinquents, particularly those organized as "maras" (gangs). And if we add to this problem the colossal effect of narcoactivity penetration in our police forces, our judicial system and even in high ranking government officials, we are faced with a lethal combination of elements that corrupt our system and allow criminals to run rampant.

2) The "multicultural, pluricultural and multilingual" reality of Guatemala as recognized by the peace accords should be focused as our primary political challenge and an element that enriches our society. It is unfortunate however, to see political activists apply these principles as a way to clash against the ladino population to meet their political agenda. The excessive political maneuvering on the part of certain politicians is aggravating the indigenous population to a point where they lose more than what they gain, producing a vicious circle that will end up perpetuating their impoverished condition.

3) The Agreement 169 of the International Labor Organization (ILO) calls for a "consulta" to be conducted at the time decisions or approvals that may affect their communities are taken by the central government. This process however, is not a referendum by the indigenous populations that would allow them to approve or disapprove any project. In reality the "consulta" is to a great extent a professional poll that illustrates the primary needs, concerns, limitations, opinions, realities, and priorities of the indigenous population affected by a given project, to be taken into account by the government and by the investor to assist and better serve the needs and interests of its neighboring inhabitants, and prevent any harm.

JORGE ASENSIO AGUIRRE  
LAWYER AND CONSULTANT  
GUATEMALA CITY, GUATEMALA





Journalists Mary Jo McConahey, author of *Maya Roads*, and Nancy McGirr, director of *Fotokids* in Guatemala, show a group of Salvadoran journalism students a T-shirt often worn by foreign correspondents in the 1980s: "Don't Shoot! I'm a Journalist."



San Juan River (Nicaragua-Costa Rica border) NBC News crew: Cecilia Alvear, Producer, Mike Boettcher, correspondent, Alexis Triboulet soundman, Hermes Muñoz cameraman. The photos on a canoe in the San Juan River were shot by Bill Gentile also in 1984 soon after Cero and his Contras withdrew from San Juan del Norte. This was shortly before the bombing at La Penca in which several journalists were killed or injured.



Guerrilla at checkpoint, El Salvador 1983



Television crew in Havana



Foreign correspondents try to keep up with Commandante Cero—Eden Pastora—in Nicaragua 1984, when Cero took over San Juan del Norte. Two of the journalists are Rod Norland, now in Kabul with the New York Times and Nieman Foundation Board member Cecilia Alvear, then of NBC News.