BREAK THE SILENCE

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October 2017

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We greatly appreciate the collaboration of Periodistas de a Pie, AC through out the development of this book.

Foreword

At first we wanted to call this book *Geography of Silence,* because it is about the spaces within politics and culture, where the press is silenced by *narcopower* through threats, harassment, and death. But as soon as we began to receive the texts from our colleagues, we realized our mistake. Even when there is silence, journalism – as an act – demands deep reflection. We recognize the power of that reflection in silence because we want and believe in a better society. This book, if anything, is therefore a cry of commitment to life and to the trade itself, but also a cry of pain and loneliness.

Make no mistake, though: these stories exist in a landscape dotted with a different kind of silence, one of insecurity and censorship, where some plunder public funds, while others loot the people (through kidnapping and extortion), and still others destroy the future of an entire generation: they recruit them as lookouts, gunmen, and drug sellers, and thus make all but certain their untimely deaths. The following pages are our attempt to break those corrupting and unpunished silences.

This book has a unique perspective, one constructed from the most surprising of sources: from the journalist's lives themselves. Those who contributed have dedicated their lives to listening to the victims and the perpetrators, to walking the streets, to climbing the hills, and to exhausting themselves on highways and back roads, but they have never told their *own* stories as a way to break through the silence. They have never chosen, until now, to lay themselves bare – their fears and their

hopes – in order to paint a picture of the totality of the Mexican narco experience. Why do these women and men continue to press on with their notebooks and their cameras? Because this is a war and they are freedom fighters. It is impossible to see them in any other light: Kowanin, Martha, Angels, Melva, Margena, Lucy, Paty, Maricarmen, Norma, Dalia, Laura, Ismael, Luis Alberto, Darwin, Jesus, Martín, Carlos Manuel , Gerardo, Santiago, Modesto, Sergio and Pedro. Their lives are now as much a part of that war story as any others, even if we can see only the most glaring horrors of that war: the 200,000 dead, the tens of thousands displaced, the trail of 110 journalists murdered for their work since 2000. And the numbers continue to rise. Even as these lines are written, a command has killed Juan Carlos Hernández Ríos, photographer of *La Bandera Noticias*, in Yuridia, Guanajuato, outside his home, on the night of September 6th, 2017.

Many of those who have written in these pages came to journalism only a few years before or just after the defeat of the PRI in 2000. They learned their trade during a change in government that promised transparency and accountability. Instead, these writers confronted the worst betrayals that Organized Crime could mete out. And what is Organized Crime? Don't be so foolish as to confuse it with some Hollywood fable. In Mexico, it's the name we give to a black hole that swallows everything: the government, the owners of the news outlets, and, of course, the most powerful leaders in business. It is the mask for the new buddy-capitalism, where public works and human life are just fodder for greed and a need for power.

The stories these journalists tell show us a sinister country: where a congressman can go into an office and beat up a journalist with total impunity; where an indigenous people choose to fight against entrepreneurs, forest cutters and drug traffickers in the hope of salvaging some relic of their way of life; and where a journalist can risk all to report on shootings and kidnappings, knowing that he carries the weight of his

murdered sources on his own shoulders, while all the while standing terrified that something may happen to his family.

Although there has been coverage about assaults on journalists recently, on the meager conditions in which they work, and on the threats, disappearances and murders that they must face, reading these stories is an even more painful undertaking than it might first seem to be. It confirms that our colleagues have known an unbearable kind of solitude because we have left them to themselves - never seeing them as victims – but simply as journalists: those who go out day after day to ask, to verify, to record, even if it's their own integrity, their own tranquility, and their own lives that are at greater and greater risk.

The aggression of the narco-government makes up the most scandalous stories in these personal tales. In Mexico, no puppet gets to keep his head. Nobody likes an independent journalist: the governor doesn't like him, so he invents a crime to put him in jail. The mayor doesn't like him, so he offers money from public funds to buy his loyalty. Not even his employer likes him: an independent journalist hinders the owner´s ability to sell out when it´s time to give up his editorial independence in exchange for an advertisement deal. But worst of all, even his fellow journalists don't like the independent journalist. Yes, those other journalists, who are just as fucked up and in just as precarious a position as he is, but choose to work for the narcos anyway: those colleagues – traitors, according to Kowanin Silva – erase the photos from their cameras (those that do not suit the taste of the local crime lord) and offer to put the independent journalist on the payroll of the *company*. And if he still refuses, the traitor takes him to the hit men to be tortured or simply to disappear.

The authors of this book cut off the heads of all the puppets. They also show how the great newspapers in the Capital actually go about their business, dismissing their correspondents

and leaving them defenseless after they publish stories and names of corrupt officials and crime lords in their states. Or the large public universities that fire their reporters for demanding a salary increase. Or the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) and Subcomandante Galeano, who veto journalists who dare to publish a version that undermines his own.

Perhaps the hostilities of the narco are the most scandalous thing, but here the authorities censure and buy the silence and adulation of the media with the money of all Mexican people, while condemning to hunger those who do not align themselves with them and reward with luxuries the media owners and bootlicking columnists. In Mexico everyone wants to have control over journalists. Over journalists who, in some cases, earn two thousand pesos a fortnight and whose employers deny them any kind of social security while claiming to be the heroes of freedom of expression. Among these stories are the journalists who assume journalism in its simplest and most profound sense: the responsibility to tell the world what is happening. As Melva Frutos says: «Because silence should not defeat us».

There is no room for useless metaphor in the stories that follow. Some are written in the form of confession. Here, journalists talk about fear, the anguish they feel when answering a call that tells them that someone knows where they are, how they are dressed, and ends up with the sentence «you are next» – doubly terrifying if that journalist just arrived at a crime scene and is standing in front of fresh blood. Or the soul-bearing of Ignacio Carvajal, who could no longer cover another execution without first soaking his brain in alcohol as if it were a cotton ball to clean up a wound. What else could he do, if that blood belonged to a fellow reporter? What else can they do if the coverage is no longer guided by GPS or a map but by the vultures that fly around clandestine graves?

The stories of these journalists stir us but they also pose ethical questions. Only those who have witnessed the horror, or

have been threatened with death or forced to move to save their own lives, can talk about the commitment necessary in order to remain a journalist.

And each admits to his or her own sense of guilt: when they yield to the threat of death and thus stop publishing the names and numbers of the fallen; when they travel to other cities and to other countries simply so as to save their own lives.

«When I finished writing this text, they killed Candido Rios,» Patricia Mayorga writes in pain.

She blames only herself.

And yet, these journalists still dream of the moment when they can tell us everything, all the stories that have piled up after 17 years amid all the false hope and hollow promises of genuine democracy. Stories that always begin with two damning questions: What don´t they want us to know? And who are those who do not want us to know? What kind of democracy makes these the cornerstones of journalistic investigation?

This book is full of rage but it is also written with an eye towards love. The love that Pedro Canché felt when he watched his two-month-old son drink milk from a bottle, the same morning that two blankets were hung on the streets of Cancun with messages threatening to kill him (and Canché knows what powerful enemies can do: former governor Roberto Borge put him in jail for nine months for no reason). There is the love for Javier Valdez, killed in Culiacán on May 15, 2017, for Miroslava Breach, executed in Chihuahua on March 23, 2017, two journalists whose murders shocked the entire country. There is the love for those comrades who have been lost to oblivion, like Alfredo Jiménez Mota, who disappeared in Sonora in 2005 when he was just 25 years old, the first and last reporter who dared to investigate the narco in that region. And there is the love between Salvador Adame and his wife Frida Urtiz, recounted in a conversation on the night before he disappeared in Michoacán.

The stories in this book make plain that journalism – at its heart – is a calling that relies on a profound act of faith: the stubborn belief that human coexistence can be inspired, that justice can be won, and that the responsibility to see the best in us rests in large part on the shoulders of those who have witnessed the crimes, the harm, and the pain.

The idea for this book came in the days immediately following the murder of the unforgettable journalist Javier Valdez, whose death took place in Culiacán on May 15, 2017. We wanted to shout our rage to the world, but came to see that the best tribute to the dead was to listen to the living: to ask journalists like Javier Valdez what it means to write from a hot zone: to allow others to tell their stories, even those who have been erased by murderous censorship. The result has been surprising: a symphony of free, dignified, and courageous voices who, through their strength, help to shatter the relentless silence.

Emiliano Ruiz Parra
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THE LAST POLICEMAN OF VALLE

Lucy Sosa

The call came in on my cell at just after 8:00 AM on Tuesday, July the 7th, 2015. I answered with a casual "good morning" but all I heard was the howling siren of an ambulance. My heart began to pound.

"Turn around, here, turn around!" I heard the voice shout.

"Hello, hello!" I insisted, almost panicking.

"They are killing us, Mrs. Journalist!" The man on the other end of the line shouted in horror. "They ambushed us. They hit Joaquín. They killed his son."

We were cut off.

I was paralyzed. Within seconds, I was calling Lucio Soria, my photographer. I told him everything that was happening and we agreed to meet at the Juarez City exit so we could travel together. It's the way we've done it for the past 9 years. Together, always together, for our own safety.

The armed attack had occurred in the city of Guadalupe. We were now just over 60 kilometers east of where Joaquín Hernández Aldaba had been the victim of this terrible act of violence. Not only was he the most recently appointed police commander in the town - named only 16 days earlier – but he was the only policeman still alive in the border community.

Lucio and I left Juarez and took the Juarez-Porvenir highway in silence, imagining what we would find. Our boss was aware of the situation, and was waiting in the newsroom for us to relay the latest information by cell so he could write it up. On the road, Lucio received a few calls from other collea-

gues and warned them about what was going on. They instantly said they would join us in covering the story, for our safety and theirs.

The minutes felt like hours until we reached my beloved Valle. TheValle of Juárez is a beautiful rural area, renowned for the quality of its cotton, but hard hit by the violence created by the Juárez and Sinaloa cartels. Since 2007, both factions have fought to control the many kilometers along a border that has no walls and only the shallow waters of the Rio Bravo to delineate it from the United States. The region has therefore become an ideal point for shipping drugs and people out of Mexico and into the US, while the US sends back arms and contraband. The fact that the area has an almost negligible police presence, makes it a paradise for narcos and a nightmare for its inhabitants. These are people with dual citizenship, whose children often cross the international bridges so as to go to school, sometimes forgetting their American passports.

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The armed attack against the commander of the Guadalupe Town Police was not the first shootout we had covered in that remote agricultural region, but this time it was different. A member of the community with no connection to the police or the cartels was clearly at risk, and had become so desperate to have us to witness the horrors firsthand, that he had called us directly I was afraid for him, for us, for everyone.

The Mexican Army had already confirmed the assault. The first version of the attack was on the front page of Diario Digital, and we learned that the soldiers were leaving the scene to accompany the ambulances of the Red Cross back to Juárez.

The Municipal Police of Juárez had set up checkpoints on the Juárez-Porvenir highway, between Juárez with Guadalupe, so as to box in any of the fleeing gunmen, Lucio quickly decided to take the new extension road, which was our only route into Valle. On any other assignment, while Lucio drives the van, I

usually look closely at the houses along the way. I try to find any small changes in those burned and abandoned hovels, any alteration in their bullet-punctured facades, all of it the product of the criminal cartels that have sowed terror in the area for so long. I hold onto the hope that, one day, I'll see the owners return and fix their homes, but that remains a distant hope. Other times I count the wrought iron or wooden crosses, which dot the side of the road, each of them placed there in memory of the residents killed between Juárez and the border towns of Guadalupe and Praxedis G. Guerrero. The number of crosses increases every year.

This trip, though, I was doing something else. Even as I took pictures of the police convoys, I was searching the streets for any sign of the killers who might still be around.

As we drove, it was hard not to recall the death of Máximo Carrillo Limones, commander of the Guadeloupe police, only sixteen days earlier. An armed command had picked him up from the village baseball field, taken him away to kill him, and then left his body at the 87th kilometer mark of the Juarez-Porvenir road, just beyond Rancho la Paloma in the town he had protected. I couldn't help but shudder remembering the photographs and the subsequent interview I had done with his family who was still in mourning. I had met Max only a few days before his death, while reporting on a homicide. He had given me some important information, and we even joked about the "big prize" he had won by accepting a public position that no one wanted.

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During the local election in 2013, the candidate for Mayor, from the PRI party, a man named Gabriel Urteaga Núñez, made a campaign promise to reinstall the Police headquartes of Guadalupe. He won the election, and even tried to keep his promise, but too many people refused to become policemen. Max was the only one who accepted the responsibility. And he did it with pleasure. He said so on the day I told him that he was crazy to be

taking on the position in a community with such a strong cartel presence.

"We have to add our grain of sand," he said simply.

The Guadalupe police force had been dismantled back in late 2010. Its Commander, Irma Érika Gándara Archuleta, disappeared on December 23rd of that year, when a criminal group broke into her house and put her name on the long list of missing women in the Valle. Erika had joined the force as a radio operator in 2009 and, by 2010, had become its commander.

I remember she told me that, years earlier, she had resigned from the force because of a spinal cord injury, but then the lack of security in the town had forced other sources of employment to shut down. So she told her family that she was returning to the police for the medical insurance. The real reason, though, was that she loved her career in the police and she wanted, more than anything, to achieve the highest rank she could.

Irma Érika was the first woman to lead a command in Guadalupe, but it was a short-lived victory as threats and "levantones" (kidnappings) from the cartels soon left her without anyone to command. Erika lost all seven of the policemen that that little town of slightly more than two thousand inhabitants could offer her.

It wasn´t until February 12th, 2011 that the decomposed body of a woman floated up in the Juárez channel. Eight months later, the Forensic Medical Service received the results of the genetic profile, and the body was officially identified as Erika Gándara, the woman who had disappeared on December 23th, 2010. Only then was Irma's family finally able to receive her body. The cause of her death was attributed to severe cranio-femoral trauma.

With the murder of its 28-year-old commander in 2010, the City Police was fully disbanded for the first time in its history, and the people were left without any means of public safety. That is, of course, until Max accepted the position in 2015. But after his murder, and the subsequent murder of Joaquín Hernández Aldaba – who held the commission for a mere 16 days

before being riddled with bullets alongside his son – Guadalupe has been left without a town police force, much to the delight of the cartels.

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Lucio and I remained silent as we passed the metal sign that welcomes visitors to Guadalupe. The now ubiquitous yellow tape – with the black word "caution" extending for several meters – soon appeared to warn us that we were close to the scene of the crime. Perched on a fence, we watched as the paramedics removed the body of Commander Joaquín, then the body of his son Jonathan Uriel Hernandez, a young man only 24-years-old. Finally, the paramedics of the Juárez Red Cross turned to the third crew member of the pick-up patrol car who had been wounded.

It was then that my cell phone began to ring again, and the rattled voice from earlier in the day spoke again on the other end of the line to explain how everything had happened. He told me that the police headquarters had received a call warning of an accident on the road. Joaquín had volunteered to check out the emergency, and his son Jonathan, who was visiting, asked if he could join him as a paramedic. Naturally, Joaquin had agreed. With them was a civilian, who had come that day to submit his application for employment. The three had left in a hurry, while the technicians in medical emergencies from Protección Civil followed them at a short distance.

"The commander went on ahead," one of the paramedics said. "We missed the turn and, as we headed back, we saw how the gunmen had surrounded the car and were firing at it from several vehicles. We had no other choice but to get ourselves back to base. We weren't carrying any weapons. We had nothing to defend ourselves with." He seemed to be blaming himself for saving his own life. "We warned the Army and the Prosecutor's Office as we headed back," he added, clearly still grappling with a guilt that shouldn't have been his. Inside the historical building, practically the entire Cabinet was in hiding. Because of

that, the doors to the municipal building were closed for a few hours on that day; the entrance to the police station, however was closed permanently by order of the mayor, Urteaga Nuñez.

The Police headquarters remain dismantled to this day.

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Valle is a community that fights against its own extinction. A little more than 1,500 people live here, out of the nine thousand that the INEGI surveyed in the 2005 count. The decrease in population, due to the violence, has been overwhelming both for locals and strangers.

Valle has areas perfect for hidden landing strips, a comparatively safe mountain range that connects its borders with the Pan-American highway, which allows passage that can avoid military and customs checkpoints. By air and land, the drug trafficking has been, for decades, the main activity in this rural area recognized internationally for the quality of its cotton.

Back, during the first week of October 2010, news surfaced of yet more violence in the town of Praxedis G. Guerrero. I telephoned the police Commander for information. A woman answered in a light, youthful voice and I thought she was the secretary. I said I wanted to speak with the Commander.

"It's me," the girl's voice explained.

That is how I met Marisol Valles García, who told me that she was 20-years-old and had accepted the job because she had a son to support. She was a student of Criminology in Juarez and felt capable of carrying out a position in which she was in charge of three other women and a few men.

I told my boss, Martín Orquiz, about her. I admitted I was worried, knowing that the area was in the middle of a turf war by criminal groups, while the state government – headed by César Duarte Jáquez – was doing little to fight crime of any kind in the region.

I was afraid for Marisol. She didn't carry a gun, and she had accepted the job even though all of her predecessors had

been executed. I never imagined the news boom that her appointment would generate: she was suddenly on the list of the most influential women in the Americas and the Spanish decided that was the bravest woman in the world. During her four months as Commander of the police force, Marisol spent most of her time managing the journalists from various parts of the world who wanted to meet with her. The media exposure, which I dreaded when I first interviewed her, finally brought an end to her short police career, as all the accolades led to death threats from the cartels. Marisol was forced to flee to the United States, where she applied for political asylum.

In May of 2017, news came that her husband had been arrested. He is currently being tried in El Paso, Texas for conspiracy to import marijuana, conspiracy to own marijuana with the intent to distribute, and conspiracy to launder money.

After Marisol's exile from Praxedis G. Guerrero, and the murder of Joaquín de Guadalupe, there were no more police in the Valle. The security of those two town is now in the hands of the State Public Safety Commission.

Even so, the fighting between the two cartels continues. There are hundreds of stories hidden in the darkest parts of this land that we will never hear because of the fear that torments its inhabitants. The Valle is a place where few reporters go, too dangerous as the epicenter of the so-called "war against drug trafficking."

After Joaquin's murder, I interviewed the mayor but was unable to keep his tears back in the face of so many deaths. At a certain point, you cannot help but sympathize. I know what it's like to lose a friend, a partner.

The violence that has devastated Juárez since 2007 creeps into most of the border homes and even into the newsroom of the journal Diario de Juárez, where Armando Rodríguez and I have worked. He was nicknamed "Choco" because of his dark complexion. He was murdered in his car with his daughter at his side. They were waiting for his other daughter so he could take them both to school. That's when those cowards shot him.

November 13th, 2008.

Fuck, I still cry.

I had no choice but to write about his death and the death of thousands more. At 11 o'clock of that horrible November morning, I decided I had to go out and continue reporting, despite the pain, despite the fear, despite everything. And it wasn´t just me. The entire newsroom wiped away their tears and went out to do their work.

That's why I was in theValle that summer morning of 2015. That's why I always go back whenever citizens call to report burned down houses or the presence of groups prowling the streets who impose curfews. Because they ask for my help to publish their children´s, their husband´s, their missing parents´ pictures. Because they send me the location of the houses via WhatsApp, where they know I'll find the hidden graves, even as the authorities ignore their anonymous tips.

Writing about what happens in the Valle has been more than a personal commitment. It's a commitment for my family as well, to put aside their own fears and concerns each time I have to go back. They know that anything can happen, even threats of violence from the Mexican Army itself. It happened to me and my fellow photographer, Mario Bañuelos. 80 kilometers from Juárez and they said we would be gone, we would disappear.

In May 2010, we were reporting on the disappearance of three municipal employees, and Mario was taking photographs of a group of soldiers on board of four olive pickup trucks with the numbers 08855364, 08855353, 08855359 and 08855367. They were tracking down the missing employees. The commander in charge was annoyed by what we were doing. The soldiers with him began to wield their long rifles, aiming them at Mario, while others struggled to take his camera away and erase his photos. I stepped in, throwing a few punches and screaming, and I finally got them to release Mario along with the equipment, but not before they threatened to have us disappear. We almost flew back to Juarez, but instead drove, and on the way back, we sent the

information to the digital version of our journal and attached the photos. If anything happened to us, we thought, at least there would be a public record. The return trip was tense, and every five minutes the newsroom called to verify that we were still alive.

The story of those threats was brought before the National Human Rights Commission and were ignored. Months later – I don't even remember how many – Mario and I got a letter stating that the soldiers were going to take courses on human rights. It was signed by General Salvador Cienfuegos Zepeda, now Secretary of National Defense.

The fear of dying while on assignment is not paranoia. In September 2010, on the 16th, Luis Carlos Santiago Orozco, a 21-year-old photographer, was murdered, and Carlos Sánchez, who had worked for only two-weeks in El Diario and was learning the trade, was also injured in the attack. On that horrible day, Lucio and I were again the first to arrive at the scene of the crime, without imagining for a second that our own colleagues had been the target of the attack. Carlos, who had often accompanied me and Lucio on assignments, was there, bleeding, almost unconscious, but embracing his camera. He gave it to me as his most precious treasure.

Seven years later, all the crimes that I have recounted here remain unpunished. Carlos continues to take pictures. A few weeks ago, we went together to the town of Las Varas, in Madera, Chihuahua, where a confrontation between cartels left 15 dead. A massacre. When we were on the road, after thanking God for our own lives, I asked him, "Carlitos, are you afraid?"

"Nah," was all he said.

We keep working. Those who also keep on working are those who survived the attack on Tuesday, July the 7th, 2015, the day that the last policeman of the Valley was murdered.

THE SILENCE OF THE SOUTHERN BORDER

Ángeles Mariscal

1. Uncle Gil

For the Chiapanecos, the use of the word "tio" or "tia" – uncle - is a sign of respect. It is generally used with elderly or familiar people, before their first names. They use it with the shopkeeper, with the old taxi driver, or with the lady who sells rotten weed outside the church. In Comitan, they even use the phrase tio Beli to talk about their countryman, Belisario Domínguez, the famous doctor and politician who contributed to the overthrow of Victoriano Huerta, back in 1914. With that same deep regard they have for their tio Beli, the comitecos began calling Gilberto Rivera Amarillas tio Gil, a Sinaloan, who arrived in Comitán in 2004. In Chiapas´ politics, tio Gil was a name always pronounced with respect, and yet it was barely whispered in the newspapers. There were reporters who heard of tio Gil´s ostentatious parties with charros, dancing horses, and well-known singers. And there were reporters who knew how tio Gil had financed the campaigns of the Mayor and the regent. But no one published a single photo or wrote a single line. How could they? Tio Gil trafficked in drugs for Chapo Guzman.

It wasn´t until June 9th, 2016 that the Chiapas´ newspaper took notice of tio Gil. On that day, one of Chapo's men was captured at the Aurora International Airport, in Guatemala City. Tio Gil had a pending order to be extradited because he was accused of distributing drugs in the United States. The news, however, quickly dried up: a day later no one was speaking of tio Gil. It was only on Facebook that a few who had met tio Gil

offered their condolences. “He was a very good person,” someone wrote, probably a little confused. Some even called him the Lord of the Southern Border.

The southern border, and especially Chiapas, is the central passageway for goods getting traded on the black market in the north: children, women, migrants, weapons, pornography, drugs. And yet, Mayors, Governors and the President want to ignore anything happening in Chiapas that could affect the rest of the country. The only references to the myriad crimes occurring every day in Chiapas are the news bulletins that sporadically appear to report random drug seizures or the location of a clandestine laboratory, or perhaps an execution Sinaloa-style – but nothing that might bother the crime lords in the area. Nothing that will alter the agreements between the narcos. Nothing to raise questions about the Mexican military, which allows the trafficking of people, drugs, and weapons to go on unabated.

To live and to be a journalist along the southern border, you need to learn silence.

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The last thing we learned about tio Gil was that he died in an American prison, from “a terminal illness that afflicted him for several years.” Days after his death, a friend from Comitan revealed to me several more telling details about the capo: details about the widow he had left behind, the people who had worked for him, and the people who had traveled to Sinaloa for the burial. He even mentioned the people who had brought flowers to one of the ranches that the capo had bought on the border with Guatemala. It turns out that tio Gil had been a mediator between politicians in the region. I asked my friend why he hadn’t published the information. He simply ignored the question. Fear, I think. Minutes later, I pressed him again for an answer and he said that he was thinking about writing a book, not only on tio Gil but also on Chucho Blanco and El Amarillo - the yellow one – the other narcos in the region. “But I’m going to change

their names," he said. I understood why: no reporter in Chiapas wants to wake up with his mouth full of flies and bullets.

Journalists in Chiapas have to close their eyes when they see all those large blue casks, which are used to store the ephedrine accumulating in the backyards of houses. Or when they see the ads that authorities have placed in tourist centers,that read: "It is forbidden to carry weapons." Or when they see trucks and trucks on the roads, pulling trailers used to transport race horses. The Chiapas reporter always knows to stick to the official version, as one did in the case of the three mariachis killed after returning from a party in Guatemala in July 2017. Everybody knew the truth. The three dead were not mariachis but cartel members, who had gone south to attend a cockfight. But that never found its way into any newspapers.

2.The paid press

It's May 2017 and we're inside the Indigenous Center of Integral Training in San Cristóbal de las Casas. There's hope in the air that the National Indigenous Congress (CNI) – part of the EZLN – will announce Marichuy as their candidate and spokesperson for Mexico's upcoming presidential election. More than 300 "journalists" have shown up to cover the event, but we are not all equal: a very clear filter separates us, catalogues us, qualifies us , labels and segregates us. In the minds of the organizers, there are only two groups: the "free, autonomous, alternative or whatever-they-are-called media," and "the paid press." The first group is comprised of members of the EZLN or organizations that sympathize with the Zapatismo. The second block is everyone else. In the end, all commercial news outlets are mercenaries. You're either with us or are against us; you're either in or out.

Javier Elorriaga Berdegue, one of the civil operators of the EZLN, is part of that filter. "Corrupt press," he tells a group of reporters, who are waiting to get their credentials so they can enter the CNI. One of those colleagues is Isaín Mandujado, who asks Elorriaga:

"When will the ban be raised on Elio Henríquez?"

"Never," Elorriaga answers, and he loses himself in the crowd.

For three years, journalists Elio Henríquez, Fredy Martín Pérez and Moisés Zúñiga have been banned from the Zapatista meetings. It all began on May 2, 2014, the day Galeano, a Zapatista teacher in La Realidad was assassinated. Elio, Fredy and Moisés went to La Realidad. They traveled for four hours. Elio - who was driving the vehicle - tried to reach the area occupied by the Zapatistas, but the people who were at the entrance - militants of the CIOAC-H (Independent Center of Farm Workers and Historic Peasants) - stopped him and began to explain their version of the facts. At the end of the interview with members of the CIOAC-H, the three journalists continued to the area where the Zapatistas were living:

"When reporters arrived at Caracol and requested an interview with the autonomous authorities, a young man with an uncovered face (usually they wear ski masks and bandanas) asked for their names and their media affiliations. He then asked if they had interviewed any members from the opposing group. Ten minutes later he came back out and said, "Gentlemen, we are not going to see you. You can go to hell." Elio described that moment in the article he wrote for La Jornada, with the headline "1 Dead and 13 Wounded, Balance of the Fray between the EZLN and the CIOAC-H."

That, of course, was the CIOAC-H version as the Zapatista had said nothing.

In subsequent days, the Zapatistas published articles on their website, and gave their side of the story on the violence in La Realidad and the subsequent death of Galeano. They detailed the continuous assaults that had preceded the murder, and argued that it was part of an orchestrated plan – part of the government´s strategy to dismember the EZLN – using shock groups and organizations like CIOAC-H. Elio and his two colleagues published this information. And for that, they were refused entry to all meetings convened by the EZLN because they were accused of spreading lies.

A year later, at the memorial for Galeano, Marcos - who by then had adopted the name Subcomandante Insurgente Galeano (in honor of the murdered teacher) - spoke again on the matter. At the same time, a trio of paid journalists, sent by Ario Velasco and his coterie of corrupt politicians, spread lies about the murder ... "Those who swallowed the government´s shit and printed it on their front pages now echo the lies from those who make up the news and present his murder as the product of a confrontation."

The Zapatistas, under the auspices of the state government, had sent Elio Henríquez, Fredy Martín Pérez and Moisés Zúñiga to intentionally publish a false version of the events of May 2, 2014.

"Twenty years of good work, twenty years covering the Zapatista movement, twenty years of pushing to open spaces in La Jornada (a newspaper that has not always been readily accessible to cover Zapatista communities), twenty years went to hell because of something the Zapatistas considered a manipulation... It is an injustice," wrote a fellow journalist, who was speaking about Elio's ban.

The death of Galeano, and the misunderstandings that occurred after the publication in La Jornada, further strained the relationship between the Zapatistas and the journalists. The Zapatistas have always questioned the unbalanced and sometimes unfair treatment they have received from the media. For the Zapatistas, journalists are an extension of these "paid news outlets" and not individuals with their own personal integrity, who often risk their jobs by questioning editorial decisions. In a "world where many worlds may fit," journalists are not seen as individuals. It's as if someone has taken away our own stories, our own work our own struggles, and lumped us in the pile with either the good or the bad, the free or the paid.

If you ask me why we continue to cover the Zapatistas - despite the terrible situation - I can only say that it is because we still believe and recognize the value and importance of movements which seek to create better living conditions for the

people in the region. I continue because I believe it is my duty to bring these stories to the public, to keep this history alive. And I continue, above all else, because I believe that this devastating and irrational animosity towards journalists comes from the megolomania of some leaders who believe that social movements must bow to their individual whims.

3.The journalist and El Chayo

The reporter, Silvano Bautista, published an article that detailed the criminal indictment against the PRI delegate Maria de Jesus Olvera Mejía, a piece which also looked into the accusations that she held two birth certificates in different names. The judge´s response was to sue Silvano for moral damages, and to force him to pay five million pesos in damages. Not surprisingly, Silvano's colleagues rallied around him and began a campaign to denounce Olvera's behavior,. It was then that two journalists - one of whom made no bones about being an adviser to Governor Manuel Velasco - took Silvano to a meeting with the president of the state Congress in order to "find a resolution" regarding the protests. Silvano agreed. Curiously, within days, the state government removed any barriers to the delayed construction of the hydroelectric plant - Chicoasén II – which had been an initiative promoted by Olvera and the CTM.

No one doubts that the truce to end the protests was part of the government's plan to negotiate with Olvera so that she would lift the blockade on the truck drivers of the CTM - an organisation she just happened to be running at the time. Nine months of inaction and, suddenly, the blockade comes to an end.

It's not hard to see how these calls for "justice" were merely ruses instigated by the government, but which clearly impacted freedom of expression directly. It's worth understanding how these deals get struck:

Before Silvano even wrote about the criminal charges against Olvera, CTM dissident truckers had denounced the

threats and legal maneuverings by the government. In a taped telephone conversation - broadcast by her pponents on Youtube - Olvera talked to one of her workers about "burning trucks," "staging a fucking confrontation," and "kicking the faces" of opposing truckers who, according to the tape, were disputing work at the Chicoasén II hydroelectric plant.

"The Delegate and Her Eight Preliminary Inquiries," was the title of Silvano´s article, written on August 5, 2015, and published in three media outlets in Chiapas.

Silvano told me that he had forgotten about the article until June 12, 2017, when that infamous summons from the State Attorney General arrived: he needed to appear in court because Olvera had accused him and one of the media outlets for moral damages. Silvano spoke with the newspaper´s managers and they agreed to take care of the criminal proceedings, while Silvano would denounce the delegate and seek support from fellow journalists. Even though there were some reservations from several journalists, because the owner of the newspaper was a former PRI delegate, we decided to launch the campaign to force Olvera to withdraw her complaint. We knew that, if the charges were allowed to proceed – whether Olvera won the defamation suit or not - it would create a terrible precedent for freedom of expression. For a week, we kept pushing the public to question the government's actions. More than that, we demanded that the Prosecutor's Office inform the Judicial Branch about the criminal indictments against Olvera because, if they had been delivered while she was in office, Olvera would have been legally obligated to give up her seat in Congress. The Prosecution's response was silence. It left Silvano no choice but to agree to the truce.

The day after the Olvera-State pact was announced, Olvera gave an interview to one of those Facebook pages that cater to government officials, claiming she was the "victim" of a journalistic smear campaign. She told them that she recognized that "under advisement from the governor," she was able to convince her fellow members of the CTM to allow the work to continue. She also said that the people whose lands were going to be

affected by the dam had accepted the compensation offered by the federal government.

The fate of the lawsuit against Silvano remains uncertain.

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"The reporters no longer fight for the article, but for the chayo." I´ve had this talk hundreds of times with my colleague Sandra and, whenever we talk about it, it reminds me of a story I once heard of another journalist: when he arrived to cover the press conference of a certain politician, he met an old reporter from the capital, Tuxtla Gutiérrez, who warned him that they were offering two hundred pesos for a favorable article. But he, being a correspondent from a national outlet, could earn up to 500 pesos. Funny, but that old reporter always walks around in a faded vest - worn through by the sun - muddy shoes, and always with his numerous media credentials hanging from his neck. His walk is hurried, his face sweaty, and his poverty lies heavy on his back.

Sandra has told me more than once not to judge my fellow journalists. "Many are sent by their editors to the streets with a badge in their hand, almost like a gun, to attack the politicians, the mayor or a delegate." I say I now can understand that old reporter, who walks with a cane in his worn clothes; I understand the old reporter who has - as his only means of work - a tape recorder held together by a rubber band to prevent it from falling apart; I understand the old reporter who, little by little, loses his teeth because his salary isn't enough to pay for a dentist. I understand it all. But what I don't understand – what fills me with rage - are the owners and columnists who choose to cozy up to the politicians so they can get rich in the vilest of ways:

"Here I am, with my buddy Governor Manuel Velasco."

"My friend, the delegate Eduardo Ramírez, is visiting us."

"It was an honor to be invited to the Baptism of the Mayor´s son."

"I am grateful for the gifts that the Secretary sent me on the occasion of my birthday."

These are the phrases that appear on Facebook pages, written by columnists and journalists, posted on their Twitter feeds – and all with such lovely photographs.

Calculating the exact amount that state governments pay to the press is an impossible task: budgetary items are handled on a discretionary basis, by "representational expenses," allocations for "payments of service," all contracted with professionals, all under the heading of "special remunerations." They even include picking up gasoline charges. And the advertising contracts? Those are never transparent. They disappear into bills from non-existent companies, which stage interviews and create promotional videos in cinemas throughout the country. It's not hard to remember how Governor Velasco made the most of his advertising budget at the end of 2013.

In most state news outlets, the Governor's press releases compete for space with interviews from politicians and public servants, all of whom spend most of their time drumming up money for their campaigns while parading out their families so as to give the impression that they are good, wholesome people – who are just like the rest of us.

"You are poor because you want to be," a colleague who earns at least 40 thousand pesos per month told me.

I never asked him what he wanted to be.

Epilogue

I'm always asked why journalists in Chiapas don't write about the cartels that traffic and operate in the state. Ok. But what would that achieve? Would it force the authorities to act? Would they be forced to alert the people to what's really going on? Isn't it´t the politicians who are making all the deals? Isn't it the people themselves who are catering to the narcos by giving them such endearing little titles such as tio?

I think of the experiences of colleagues from other states, the stories of the cartels and the violence, and how distant it once

seemed to me, all those years ago. I think of the death of my companions, of the disappeared, and of the exiled. And I think of how being a journalist on the southern border is, for now, a life that must be lived in silence. But the time will come. This I know, as well. I know the time will come to tell the story. And that must be enough for now.

Letter to my editor about Javier

Ismael Bojórquez

Dear Alejandro, I just counted the days and they are ninety-two. Exactly three months ago Javier Valdez was killed. I do not know why the hell you picked August 15th to hand in this text that has cost me so much effort to sit down and write. It's a bad day, forevermore the 15th will be a bad day for us. And Mondays. And noons. And the number 12, because of the hour when they killed Javier. Twelve. Twelve cartidges strewn on the pavement with their spicy smell of burnt gunpowder.

I passed by that street and I saw him again lying face down, his hat barely moved away from his pale head, the same one that for so many days and nights kept looking for ways to make us less unhappy. There was no one on the street, it was rainy, but I got out of the car again to confirm that it was him. I knew it was him. I walked and turned and looked at him again: his body still warm, his skin alive and that wounded arm with which, apparently, Javier covered himself, as if trying to stop what could not be helped: it had already been written with burning lead in some damned cave.

I sat by the side of the cenotaph that his family had erected. A fist of flowers was swept away by the rain and a sign drawn by his friend Dante was clinging to a pole. On a sheet of galvanized sheet the Tarjeta negra comic strip stands, drawn by the artist AVC, where Javier rises like Lazarus of Bethany and illuminates the world with his light: "They wanted to shut you ... and now your voice is everywhere ".

I have read and reread the most recent texts written by Javier. And I have reviewed their context. And many times I've gone through the stupid way he was killed to then leave his car

on a sidewalk. Do you remember what we told you about that work you published in the magazine Gatopardo? In this case we can not spare lone more or one less word. Here in Sinaloa that translates into two paths: life or death. And I search and search for those extra words or those lesser in the texts of Javier, or wonder if we naively broke the balances that once saved us from what has now happened. I do not know yet.

We knew it could happen. That's why we always worked in fear. "With our hand on our ass," the bato used to say, but we always work.

The sinister shadow of a commander

Javier told you at El Guayabo: "Here they really kill you, here you get really scared. Here you risk your life every day." And he told you the dark story of our comrade Luis Fernando Nájera and the commander Barceló, a former Gafe member -a group of Mexican special air forces- who formed an elite group called Centauro within the ministerial police. A story told between beers in a beach hut that, some travelers say, looks like a Cuban bar.

One day Nájera was covering a stake out of policemen in the subdivision Tabachines, Los Mochis. It was midnight and he arrived with his little camera firing flashes. Comandante Barceló approached him, snatched the camera away and hit him with a blow that blew his glasses away. Then he kicked him in the ribs, while threatening him: "I can kill you, you bastard, for snooping I´ll kill you!" Nájera was taken to jail, for getting in the middle and whatever else (Najera was released the following morning and we denounced the assault at a public ministry that same day).

Javier was in Los Mochis that day, covering for La Jornada a very short Andrés Manuel López Obrador tour. He called me half stunned, half pissed: "Bato, the police arrested Najera ... they accused him of carrying a gun and firing...". The assignment was given to Javier, a mixture of luck and misfortune, the two together; heaven and hell in a blender, as Paco Ignacio Taibo II says in his novel Feeling that the Battlefield. We contex-

tualized the information with a series of abuses committed by the Centauro Group against inhabitants of several municipalities and published it in our next edition. The follow-up was also done by Javier. Just like he did when the federal judge acquitted Nájera and ordered an investigation on Barceló and the policemen who had accused the reporter, because they had lied to the judicial authority. The judge added charges of torture, injuries and illegal deprivation of liberty.

At the State Congress, Javier wrote about the request of the majority to have the local attorney's office report on Barceló´s abuses and to act rigorously. And although local and federal lawmakers had already met with the governor to demand that he punish Barceló, the commander wanted to know who that other reporter who had dared to harass and expose him was. And so, one night, he began to prowl around Javier's house. Javier noticed and managed to detect three vehicles, including a Durango truck.

With that information Javier and I went hunting for Barceló to the headquartes of the police. Crazy and alone, as Javier had described us, without any protection. We located two of the cars, wrote down their plates and took pictures of them. As Barceló was out of town, we decided to wait for him for several hours. We were so exposed that some policemen approached to interrogate us. Who were we and what were we doing there. We told them that we were academics of the UAS and that we were waiting for relatives to file a complaint. At night Barcelo finally arrived in his white Durango, all dressed in black. We took pictures of him and we left. Days later, the commander was suspended, thanks to our complaint and because we had spoken with the governor to warn him that Javier was in danger.

Barceló was put on permanent leave two months later, in September 2007. He worked for the Beltrán Leyva brothers. He was from Hidalgo but had decided to stay in Culiacan, for his bad luck. In 2008, when a fierce war broke out inside the Sinaloa Cartel, the commander bet on the Beltran brothers and lost. In June of that year, a van appeared overnight in the Montebello

subdivision with three beheaded men in the trunk. One of them was Barceló. They had so much hatred for him that they also placed a headless viper on his chest. When the autopsy was done, the forensic doctors realized that someone had stuck the tip of a knife to his nape and slid it all the way back to his coccyx. They did all this while Barceló was still alive.

That's why Javier told you that he let out a lot of air when he learned of Barceló's death, because he always felt him breathing right on his nape, his sinister shadow even in nightmares.

El Chapo Dines at Las Palmas

Javier did not enjoy much of that tranquility with which he liked to sit down and savor a tequila or a whiskey at El Guayabo while listening to Casimira´s dirty jokes or a smooth jazz played by the bar band. And he did not enjoy it much because just a few months later he chronicled the unexpected visit of Chapo Guzman to the Las Palmas restaurant. Do you remember, Alejandro?

It was Friday, November 30th, like eight o'clock in the evening, when two boys entered the restaurant and spoke to the diners. "Gentlemen, in a few moments a very important person is coming to dinner. We'll have to close the doors. No one can enter or leave. And we will pick up all your cell phones. Do not worry, we'll pay your bills. "

Someone had given me the basic information, but we had to confirm it. So Javier went to the restaurant, ate a medium sized goat, identified an acquaintance and then returned to tie up the loose ends of the story. "And what did he eat?" Javier asked his source. "The usual: meat and seafood". Chapo arrived accompanied by a group of bodyguards, personally shook all the diner´s hands and then went to a private room that has a side entrance. That's where he got out from when he finished his dinner, almost two hours later.

The note was published on December 10th. That same day, members of the Special Review Group, who are supposed to do the intelligence work in the Mexican army, went to the

restaurant to investigate the facts and, when they got the usual denials from the owners, they recommended that management should sue Ríodoce for defamation. Then we heard that the Chapo was very angry about the note and had threatened to give us a scare, but one of his associates told him to forget about it, that "the boys were only working."

That is why Javier already had his sphincters tightened. Because when you write these revealing notes, someone always comes and reminds you that writing like this is like walking on a minefield, where you do not know when exactly you will explode. And that´s when the fear that always accompanies you becomes a dense shadow, even if you never let it become turn into a ballast.

Frank Armenta: truths under threat

It also happened when we published a video where Frank Armenta Espinoza, a former body guard of Mario López Valdez accuses the former governor of collaborating with the Sinaloa Cartel.

I tell you, Alejandro:

On June 4th, 2013, Frank was on vacation in Guasave when he was picked up by an armed group. The news of the kidnapping spread that same day but it wasn´t until three weeks later that a video arrived at a bin we had on our website that was called S.O.S. The module was linked to an editorial email and was detected the day after it was sent. We opened it to see its contents and we couldn´t believe it. It was Frank on a video camera denouncing that Malova was related to the Chapo Guzman and to Mayo Zambada and that he had met with them several times. We wrote a note alongside the video. It was a national scandal.

In the middle of July a new video arrived where Frank broadens the information on the alleged links of Lopez Valdez with the Sinaloa Cartel and gives details of his trips in government state helicopters to La Tuna, Badiraguato, the native land of Chapo.

The publication of these videos is perhaps one of the riskiest decisions that we took in Riodoce. Many people warned us that we were in danger of being attacked. We were picking a fight with the most powerful drug cartel this country has had for decades, exposing the governor and his cabinet, publishing private conversations of the police chiefs that evidenced their great collusion with the underworld and their involvement in crimes, and we also wrote stories where the high commanders of the army were tarnished. And we did it in a war atmosphere between the cartels that left thousands of murdered in Sinaloa alone.

Frank Armenta Espinoza was found dead in Culiacan 68 days after his abduction. He was found him in the southern sector with nine bullet hits. He had been tortured. The government "lamented" his death and that he had been used by an organized crime group "for the perversity of his actions."

Frank was raised by orders from Chapo Isidro, an operator of the Beltran Leyva brothers. Then we got the information that this little capo and the government of Malova had reached an agreement. From Guasave to the border with Sonora it would be their territory. Some changes were made in the police in that area and after several confrontations things returned to normal.

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We have not returned to Guayabo, carnal, since that damn Monday 15th. But Casimira and Lefty explain to those who ask for us that we could not be there without crying. It´s just down from our office, you see, just a boulevard in between. I said it jokingly but if I had had money I would have installed a zipline to get down from newsroom right to the bar door. We had already imagined Javier in the first flight, with all of us taking photos and videos. Maybe it was not such a bad idea.

But we'll be back, when we run out of tears.

INTOXICATED

Ignacio Carvajal

Coatzacoalcos, julio, 2017

Coatzacoalcos, July, 2017

"Because it´s you and the news outlets you handle, we have some resources: 15,000 pesos a month."

"We already told you before," he insists, as the old car, which we're in, drives on. "They used a strong tone with you. I've come to apologize for that. You'll come to see that if you handle things well and coordinate your actions with the other boys, this won't happen again. We are a new administration and we don't want any problems with the press. We want to be friends with the journalists."

A short time had passed since the murder of Yolanda Ordaz, her nephew Gabriel Huge, and Esteban Hernández; even a shorter time since the homicide of Don Miguel Angel López Velasco -Milo Vela- his family, and the beloved Gordo, Misael Lopez Solana. The state of Veracruz was already being classified as one of the most dangerous places to practice journalism on the planet.

In Veracruz, the mafia kills you or you disappear., But, if you're a journalist, they first try to gain your "friendship" playing good cop/bad cop with you. In my case, it was the reverse: I got scolded right from the start. That afternoon, their messenger reminded me of that awful time:

"Son of a bitch, didn´t we say that article wasn't to be published?" spat the voice on the other end of the radio.

It was not the first threat I'd received, but this time I paid close attention when I heard my address, my car´s plates, and a description of the clothes I had worn that afternoon over the phone. "Look, you bastard, I don´t care how you do it, but I want you to take down that information, if not ..." And then I heard the sound of a bullet entering the chamber of a gun.

I was on vacation and disconnected from the world. Someone had warned me about five decapitated corpses, whose remains had been thrown in front of a town hall in the region. They were the municipal police and relatives of the mayor, and their heads had rolled down the floor of the mayor's office, as if in a bowling alley. But I hadn't paid any attention.

My editor had seen the information on Narcoviolence, a web page that published narco stories from Veracruz. He had rewritten the article and had uploaded it onto our web page. But the new criminals didn't want any scandals in the press. A few days before, Enrique Peña Nieto had been sworn in as president of the Mexican Republic, and Javier Duarte de Ochoa, the governor of the state, had lied and said he had freed Veracruz from the scourge of the Zetas.

Meanwhile, at the political level, narco pacts were getting woven together, all while criminals and politicians were holding hands. The bad guys didn't want any more violence, even if they were the ones continuing to perpetrate it. For them, the Zetas had been defeated, and there was no reason to ask about massacres or kidnappings. The winners of the war - the Jalisco Cartel - wanted to pacify the port town; the Zetas wanted the opposite, to heat up the place. Smack dab in the middle of it all were the reporters.

That's why the voice on the other side of my Nextel kept reminding me of the way they had killed three photographers, whose bodies had been dismembered, put into black bags, and thrown into a drainage channel.

"Do you want the same thing to happen to you?" he shouted. "It's the boss of the Plaza calling, it's December 23rd, and tomorrow is the 24th. Do you want your family to spend this beautiful date mourning your body?"

I answered with a trembling voice. I said that I was on vacation, that if I he knew so much about me, then the same people who had informed him could confirm that, after four years, I had finally taken a vacation and didn't know anything about those beheadings.

He hung up.

20 minutes later he called back.

"Look." He sounded more relaxed. "They already told me that you're upfront, no bullshit."

"Okay, I believe you ..."

"But I want you to do me a favor, okay? Can you?"

"Go ahead, tell me," I replied.

"Call your boss and tell that bastard to take the information down. If not, there will be trouble, and if they don't want to take it down, give me that bastard's phone number and I'll call him myself."

I called my editor immediately and told him everything: that they were closely monitoring me and probably them too. I told him about each and every one of the threats to dismember and throw us into the Zamorana drainage channel.

My editor didn't hesitate. The article was taken down.

The guy called me again, more relaxed, even happy.

"Thank you, my son, thank you for the favor. Look, the truth is we don't understand you guys, you reckless fucking reporters. If you're told not to do something, just don´t do it, you bastards. "

He continued:

"Tomorrow is the 24th. Don´t you think I'd like to be with my family, enjoying the day, drinking beer? But no. I have to solve these bullshit things you guys do. Those people that got killed, don´t worry about them. They're scum, not worth having around in our society. They're filthy Zetas that must be killed because they're hurting everybody. I'm doing a good job, but then you guys start fucking writing about it. You really like to

pester me. Ok. That´s it. Get the fuck out of here, have a good time, don´t be an asshole, and don´t go around publishing stupid stories."

That was the relationship: close to 10 minutes of listening to a voice that had first wanted to dismember me and now was going on about how frustrating it was to kill people on Christmas´ eve.

I canceled my vacation. If I was going to be killed, it would be for things I had done, not for other people´s actions. Questions began ringing in my ears. How did they get my radio number? How did they know so much about me and about the other journalists I had met?

I had no doubt that my own friends had sold me out. It became clear to me. I couldn't sleep that day or the next. I wanted to ease my paranoia with sex but it didn´t work. I didn't stop for a month. Around that time, a support network for journalist called "Periodistas de a pie" invited me to a course-workshop-experiment with trauma and stress specialists, who had been sent from Columbia University. People came from all over the country to talk about their pain. Listening to people with similar problems or worse gave me some sense of security. It helped me face what was coming.

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I saw him outside my office. Not surprisingly, he was accompanied by another journalist and, inside the car, a man wearing glasses, impeccably shaved, dressed in linen, and smelling oh so clean, who opened the door of the rickety car for me.

I knew what this whole thing was about when I noticed a van full of people, who were watching our every move.

"These two guys you already know," Mr. Good Smell said. "I think you already know who we are. We're the new administration, a company that doesn't want to fight with you or mistreat you. We want to leave that behind. We don't want publicity, at least not more than what´s necessary. Things are going

to keep happening. But we'd like not to see some of it in the papers. We want you to help us get that done, and that's why we're having this little visit."

He was carrying a folder in his hand. It had several names on a list, all crossed out. I knew almost all of them.

"You don't have to do anything," he said. "Just forget about what happens in Veracruz and Boca del Rio. And, look. I'm glad you're handling this personally. There are some folks who go around acting like they're doing something and getting paid for what other people are doing, without them even knowing that their names appear on these lists. I thank you for that.

"If you think I'd cause you problems," I said, "it won't happen. You won´t even remember me. I can forget about Veracruz and Boca del Rio, no problem. I'm not going to fight with you for some newspaper piece, but the money…forget about that. I'll be cheap."

The journalists who had brought me to the car listened as Good Smell stared at me in amazement, as if he'd just won the lottery. He then threw me out of the car, and warned me that if I ever saw him again on the street, I should just keep walking. I had no problem with that.

I never saw him again, nor the two journalists. My confidence was shot. Now, if I see either of those journalists , I walk down the first street I can find. Last I heard, they were worried about threats from the new PAN-PRD government, which just announced they were imprisoning reporters who were acting as informants. Good luck with that.

I stopped writing about Veracruz and Boca del Rio for a while, and wrote on things that had nothing to do with violence and blood in the streets. Instead, I focused on covering human rights´ violations. The whole country was a big black hole, where state and criminal abuses went unpunished.

Did I collaborate with criminals by accepting a zone of silence in Veracruz through my self-imposed censorship ? I don't know. What I do know is that I'm still poor, and those other

journalists, who entered into that contract, don't sleep as well as I do.

* * *

What really happened in Veracruz and Boca del Rio during the years of Javier Duarte in the state government, of Arturo Bermúdez as Secretary of Public Security, and of Navy commanders in key security positions? There's no way to tell that story without turning to the endless reports of violent crimes, people dying by the truckload, in the most absurd conditions, so-called thefts and accidents. That´s what the reports said. Just accidents.

There were no executions, no kidnappings, although they were still happening. People just began to disappear. Women, teenagers, working-age men – gone, everywhere. The majority of the victims, though, were young people between 18 and 35, all of them taken by force and smeared by dubious sources that linked them to criminal activity or to the Zetas.

In those days, everyone steered clear of the envoys from the crime lords. If you heard about violence in the night or early morning, you waited to read about it in the local newspapers. If it was reported, then and only then could you write about it. Otherwise, it was just another story to file in the censorship drawer.

And that´s how it was at the time of Enrique Peña Nieto's first visit as President to Veracruz. On January 6th, 2013, hundreds of people were bused in from all over the country. Hours earlier, in an area known as Casas Fantasmas (Ghost houses), the bodies of eleven people were left on the street, with a message signed by Los Zetas, warning everyone that they had no intention of letting go of their territory.

"Please," pleaded one of the reporters, crying when he saw me writing about the violence. "I beg you for my life. If you publish that story with an international paper, they're going to fuck us all. I 'm begging you for my life. Don't publish it."

I told him I wouldn't . And yet, at night, they threatened me again from an unknown number.

The on-going silence reached its pinnacle in August of 2016, when mothers of the Solecito organization unveiled a secret grave at Colinas de Santa Fe, just a few minutes away from the port of Veracruz. In it were more than 260 corpses, mostly victims of organized crime and police brutality. Not the army, not the Navy, not the State Security Agency – and not the press – took any notice, as the largest mass grave in Latin America's recent history was uncovered.

* * *

In July 2015, just a few meters from the entrance of that death ranch, the corpse of journalist Juan Mendoza was found. Hours before, he had been reported missing. The prosecutor at the time, Luis Angel Bravo Contreras, said that Mendoza had been run over by a car, but the prosecutor could never explain why a bandage had been discovered that was covering his eyes when he was found on the Veracruz-Xalapa highway, or why the taxi that he had driven was found several kilometers away.

It's clear that Contreras had no interest in digging deeper. No doubt some unpleasant details about his own life would have come to the surface. I remember that he had once called my number: "Buddy," he said. "I know you have a web page, and that you wrote an article like that and so... look, okay, I have some friends interested in publishing another article. I'll send it to your mail, and if you want, I'll give you some support. "

I never answered his calls again.

GUILTY FEELING

A Nextel alert began ringing on my phone at dawn on July 26th, 2011. It was an Army commander: "Your friend was found decapitated behind the Imagen newspaper."

Accompanied by the photojournalist Félix Márquez, I found only a patrol car at the site, guarding the corpse. She had been reported missing for over 48 hours earlier.

"Please, only take pictures of the authorities' movement, not of your friend´s corpse," one of the reporters on the crime beat said. It was ironic as he had built his career photographing hundreds of corpses.

The scene was shocking. This strong woman, from the Jarocho port´s crime beat, was bleeding out on the street, while her friends were trying to save just a bit of her dignity even in death. The policemen were drinking Coca Colas to hide their fear.

We took the photos and ran to a minimart to get some booze, in the hope that we might forget the sight of her dripping head. I had last seen her thirty-seven days before. Then, the coffins of Miguel Ángel López Velasco and his family had been paraded before her eyes. That day, she looked like she was made of lead, her expression not of sadness but of angst and a great inner suffering.

By dawn, we had finished several cans of beer. Drinking and working is the usual at the port, more so if you're reporting on the horrors of a massacre, with 35 corpses thrown onto the street or two houses full of people mutilated with a hand saw. Blood and gunpowder are always a good excuse to get drunk, get high, or both.

There have been times when I know I won't be able to cover one of these stories without getting drunk. That´s what I told a correspondent from The Christian Science Monitor, who had traveled from the United States to document stories about murdered reporters. The Gringa sounded very excited at the prospect of talking to me. No one had ever interviewed me. I didn't know what to say, so I tried to be honest. I told her that sometimes I had to write 10 to 12 articles a day for different outlets just to earn $3,500 pesos a week. Or that before going out to report on a shooting, I had to throw back four shots of whiskey just to muster enough courage to go through with it. I think she didn't believe a word because she kept questioning my ability to

do the job, to drive myself and my colleagues while I was drunk. She never sent me the web link to the story.

WHAT IS CORRUPTION?

Pesos flew through the air and I couldn't hide the shame on my face. Five minutes earlier, I had been interviewing Víctor Flores, a railroad leader, president of the Congress of labor, a workers' union addicted to the PRI.

As I was recording him, I stood there stunned by the thickness of the gold chains and the glittering rings he was wearing. We were standing in a corner of the Parroquia café down by the pier. Behind him was a mural painted by Bruno Ferreira. It depicted the average journalist in Veracruz: politicians spewing their usual diatribes, reporters taking notes (and, bribes under the tables), while one reporter stood in the middle of it all, refusing the bribe.

The hope of every journalist who wants respect – and who lives on a $4,500 peso stipend every two weeks, while holding onto three other jobs – is to find a way beyond the corruption. And every day he asks himself, which corrupts more: taking a wad of bills or accepting breakfast or a small gift? I didn't expect so much self-recrimination that day, so when I felt an associate of the railway leader trying to put a roll of bills in my shirt, I left.

He followed me out of the cafe. Under the gaze of the other journalists, I knew my impulse to reject the money was natural. But I underestimated my strength. We both lost our balance, and the bills flew up into in the air. I counted out six $500 bills. Almost a full two-week's salary.

Awkwardly, the messenger repeated, "He liked your questions, and says you're tough, but not rude, so he sends you this."

I kept walking.

A colleague, with more than 40 years of experience, stopped me when he noticed I hadn't taken the chayo. "Boss," he said. "That isn't done. Soon they'll think we're all like that and they won't want to give us the dough. Better for you not to come to these events. I'll send the info to your email."

* * *

Later, I saw that same journalist arrive at the press room in the city hall of Veracruz. I thought it was strange, because just two days earlier he had gone on vacation because of a car accident. He had hurt his right hand, which he used for taking notes.

$1,200 peso´ shoes, $1,000 trousers, and a $900 shirt. I remembered what Manuel Buendía used to say about corrupt reporter´s appearance.

"Hey," another colleague said. "What are you doing here? You have an injured hand, you can´t write or take any notes. You can't work.".

"Look," he answered. "I may not be able to write with this hand, but I can do this with the other one," and, immediately, he put out his good hand with his palm extended.

The laughter of those present dissipated the mid-morning doze .

FRIENDS IN THE AIR

They called him the "H" Chicken. His name was Juan Francisco Alvarado Martagón, and he worked for Los Zetas in Acayucan. The Navy had detained him in February of 2012, and had taken him to the La Sota de Oro ranch, where 14 bodies had been exhumed. Men and women who had been reported missing were found, puréd, their bones decalcified. It was one of the first secret graves to be found in southeastern Mexico, and it attracted the attention of a lot of journalists.

We traveled 300 kilometers from the jarocho port to see the ranch, and bear witness to the graves. The Navy would not let us pass. For several hours we patiently waited for the authorities and the forensic vans to leave so we could get into the ranch.

A sailor, who noticed our resolve, told Felix Marquez and me, "The graves aren't where your comrades are going. Go to the top of those trees. They're over there." He pointed before leaving.

On top of a mango tree, a few vultures were waiting to swoop down on the remains of the carrion that was still inside the holes. They were simply waiting on the traces of death and brutality and impunity that littered the front pages of every newspaper and magazine.

In June of 2012, we relived that scene, when11 bodies were exhumed from graves in Lerdo de Tejada, a city about an hour and a half from Catemaco, the land of sorcerers. This time, we didn´t meet up with the authorities or roads, for that matter, only the immense sea and sand, across from which were hundreds of acres of bushes and chaparrals, where the holes had been abandoned.

Solos, Marquez, and I saw where the birds were lurking, and little by little we let them lead us in our car to the exhumation site. On the way back, we wondered who was more miserable: the birds of prey, who sought only their food, or us, who sought to document and sell what others had tried to hide. We didn´t find an answer, except that we knew our allies were flying high above us.

TIME TO DIE

Thoughts about life and death consumed me during a gunfight on May 21st, 2011, in the vicinity of the Adolfo Ruiz Cortines Boulevard in Boca del Rio. Soldiers had discovered the whereabouts of a Zeta chief, and they were trying to grab him while he was quietly eating at the best meat restaurant in the area. His guards decided this might not be the best time to abandon their boss, so they opened fire. It didn´t matter. He was killed within minutes.

Just across town, the Salsa Festival was getting underway. It was the brainchild of Javier Duarte, the chance to waste millions of pesos so he could stay in the good graces of the Boca del Rio electorate, an area controlled by his political rivals, the Yunes family. Everyone there knew that the gun fight would make a good story. Since I've never been one for dancing,

I was chosen by my colleagues for a little reconnaissance work, to make sure that it was ok to cover the incident, and reassure them before they headed in.

At first glance, the confrontation seemed to be over. Dozens of people were swarming to watch as soldiers approached the perimeter. But I noticed three trucks a little ways off, filled with armed men who were scoping out the area, looking for a point of entry, maybe to rescue the corpses or maybe for revenge. I looked for a place to hide. I found it in an open house right in front of the "Niños heroes" monument. I jumped out of my car, without even turning it off.

"Hey, we should go inside," I told a couple, who apparently owned the house and who were watching the soldiers. "Reinforcements are coming."

I ran in, with them right behind me, as bullets whizzed past my head.

"Yes, fuckers, here it comes..." shouted the hired gunmen from the three vans.

Diving onto the living room floor, the young couple and I sought shelter in the kitchen, near a corner, where bullets were now bouncing off the wall. We crouched out of harm's way, but it was evident that the soldiers were losing this second confrontation and were only holding back the assault. They screamed and cheered as the shooting on the hitmen's side became more and more intense. The sound of those assault rifles made me think that hell was opening up right under our feet.

I took out my radio and warned my comrades to turn back, that things had lit up again.

"Where are you? Get out of there!" they yelled, as they heard the bullets roar over the line.

"No way compas," I said. "It's been a pleasure working with you, but I think I'm not getting out of this one."

The couple became much more frantic, and began to pray. She asked me for my phone and warned her family not to come.

From the kitchen, where I was sheltering myself, I heard the desperate cries of women and children, who were trapped in a nearby restaurant. Bottles were breaking, grenades exploding.

"This is it," I thought. "This is as far as I go. These poor soldiers are going to lose, and then those bastards will come for us."

My comrades kept sending me messages to stay patient.

After another 15 minutes, I heard the beating of propellers and the gunshots from a 50 milimiter caliber barrette, mounted on a Navy helicopter that was hovering over the soldiers as reinforcement. Less than a minute later, I heard a scream:

"Escape, escape, escape!" and then the grinding of tires.

There was applause and shouts of joy from the soldiers.

Grateful to the Supreme Being, I pulled myself together and left the house. There were bodies strewn everywhere, wounded soldiers, guns on the floor with hundreds of spent cartridges scattered across the road. The soldiers saw me, said nothing, so I immediately left without taking a single picture. They were still riding high on adrenelin from the roar of the battle.

I had survived and was thinking only of getting out of there.. I needed time to process all of this.

The next day I returned to the area so as to document the ravages of the shootout. Bullet-ridden houses, tires blown out. I met the couple from the night before and realized I hadn't even said goodbye to them.

"Hey, thanks for letting me in," I said. "You saved my life."

"Don´t worry," the wife said. "It wasn't our house. We were just passing through. We moved to the house because you screamed, and we ran in thinking it was your house."

By noon, they had identified the mobster commander who had been killed in the shootout.

"Do you know who they killed?" the crime beat reporter said with a mixture of joy and surprise. "They killed Rolando Beytia, El Manitas (little hands)."

Beytia had been a member of the Attorney General's Office, but had left and gone to the other side. The reporters, who had suffered through the years of covering him, recalled how much he despised journalists and, at the slightest opportunity, had punished them by beating them with planks when they ignored him. No one was ignoring him now.

I RAN INTO DEATH

I took the first opportunity I could find to leave Jarocho port. What was the point? It was a time when you had to wait for authorization even to write about a homeless guy who had died from hypothermia. Anything having to do with corpses, death, blood, bullets or disappearances – that was all subject to censorship.

But death itself wasn't censored. In my new job, as head of information at Liberal del Sur, I getting acclimated by meeting my new colleagues. One of them was Gregorio Jimenez de la Cruz, our correspondent in Villa de Allende. When I arrived at his home, I knew that an armed command had just kidnapped him. It was terrible. I saw the misery in which he lived, all the while having to listen to inane questions from uninterested policemen, who should have been out looking for him. His wife was trying to call the Secretary of State to find someone who could help. Six days later, his decapitated body was found in a secret grave.

There was no way to escape the violence, a violence much more shocking this time. It provoked a feeling of despair that led me to ask: When will my turn come?

But the deeper question in Veracruz remains: why are journalists still being murdered? Is it because we write about the violence that bothers the governor and the cartels? Is it because we foster all of those dangerous relationships in order to unearth the truth? Or is it simply because some take bribes? I don't know, but it's a feeling that has forced me to learn by heart that simple refrain uttered by the just judge in the Colombian version of "Rosario Tijeras":

If they have eyes they should not see me,
If they have hands they should not hold me,
If they have feet they should not reach me,
Do not let them surprise me from behind,
Do not let my death be violent,

Do not let my blood spill,
You who know everything,
You know of my sins,
But you also know of my faith,
Do not forsake me
Amen.

THE LAST GREAT REPORTER WHO COVERED THE NARCO

Luis Alberto Medina

DEAR JOSE ALFREDO,

The day you disappeared in Hermosillo, Saturday, April 2nd, 2005, journalists in Sonora understood the macabre rules of the game: We could not do journalism on drug trafficking, its impact and scope. Its affectations and operations. If we did, we would be the next one the earth would swallow. You were the last great reporter in Sonora to thoroughly investigate drug trafficking. The transport routes, the profiles of the capos and their gunmen, the business interests, the money laundering, the relation of the crime lords with government officials and policemen, the collection of bribes. You knew everything and that's why they took you. You were 25 years old.

A couple of years ago, *Proceso* magazine informed that in 2011 a protected witness made statements to the Mexican authorities saying that your disappearance, alleged torture and murder was triggered by information that you were about to publish on Raúl Enriquez Parra, aka *el 9*,an operator in the south zone of Sonora and part of the number´s band or the *güeritos (blondies)*. Here I apply self-censorship myself. I can not write names or surnames. Sorry, Jose Alfredo: I do not live in Mexico City or any other place far from Hermosillo. But there are many like me that know that your disappearance was staged by state and federal officials, and I write this letter so that you may not die.

José Alfredo Jiménez Mota was a dark skinned, sturdy guy who was six feet tall and whose hands were so big that when

he showed them they looked like the hands of a cave man. I remember him walking like a giant walks in cartoons: bending forward as if he was about to collapse. His northern accent was also imposing. He was very rude on the outside, but inside he had an open and generous heart. He always smiled and he was never afraid. I still remember him with his notebook in the left back pocket of his pants and the radio scanner that the newspaper *El Imparcial* gave to all its reporters in one hand. Like any journalist, Jose Alfredo wanted to see his name published on the cover of the newspaper. He was tireless. He even worked on holidays. Like that time when a prisoner in a wheelchair escaped and Jose Alfredo reported that story.

I think all this while waiting for the man who brought Jose Alfredo to Sonora: Jorge Morales Borbón, former editor of *El Imparcial*.

Allow me to introduce you to Jorge: he was released from prison on December 23rd, 2016. He was held for ten months in the Social Readaptation Center 1 at Hermosillo. He was accused of extorting money from the media: he invented a system to purchase notes in the printed newspapers of Sonora. The kind that appear with an informative and sycophant text, and without a reporter's signature. His case is in the hands of the Court, because Jorge alleges that there were irregularities in his trial due to failures of the Sonora Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office. I met him in July 2003, when he hired me as a reporter at *El Imparcial*. In that newspaper, Jorge built his journalistic prestige: he won awards, recognitions, until one day he went to the dark side, as we call the areas of social communication that deal with parties, governments, politicians and all those people whom journalists are supposed to investigate. Jorge ended up working for Guillermo Padrés, the first former governor in the history of Sonora who was put in prison.

That's Jorge and he's already in front of me telling me about a meeting in Mexico City with colleagues from the State Publishers Association in September 2004, where he asked if anyone knew an intrepid reporter that could help him inves-

tigate security issues in Sonora. "I was told that Alfredo, who worked in Culiacán for *El Debate*, would be the right person for the job. And that he was from Sonora, from *Empalme*. I called him and he agreed to come to Hermosillo" says Morales. Jose Alfredo at that time earned five thousand pesos. Jorge offered him nine thousand. "And he even thanked me" recalls Morales.

At that time, Sonora was going through an unprecedented surge of violence in the south of the state. The situation was aggravated because on January 1st 2004, at a wedding in Navojoa, drug trafficking groups clashed in the central square. The Salazar against the Enriquez Parra gang. Both cells operated within the Sinaloa cartel. From there on a wave of murders in the entity was unleashed. And Jorge needed someone to help him explain why we had reached those levels of violence in Sonora. What groups were they facing? Who were the victims? Why?

Alfredo investigated drug trafficking in Sonora as no one else previously had. His problem was that he did it without taking any personal care or security measures, nor did the newspaper. "We never thought that organized crime was going to mess with journalism in Sonora," says Morales, and I know: I lived the disappearance of Jose Alfredo and I could not believe it.

On Monday, April 4th, at the reporters' meeting that was held every day in the editorial office of *El Imparcial*, the editors informed us that they had not heard anything from Jose Alfredo since friday and asked if anyone had seen him. We all looked stunned at each other´s faces; we had no idea what was happening. "I saw him eating at Los Grillos," I replied and immediately thought of Rodolfo El Fito Urias, the owner of the restaurant that was just around the corner from *El Imparcial*. Fito must known something. And so it was.

"I saw him desperate, scared. He told me that, apparently, they were following him," El Fito told me, words more words less, when I went to see him at Los Grillos that Monday. Later, editor and chief Sebastián Moreno confirmed to us that Alfredo had called Shaila Rosagel, another reporter and his best friend, to tell her that a source had called him. Shaila told Sebastian that

Alfredo was very nervous and, although he did not tell her the name of the source, he did let her know that it was about an uncomfortable contact.

A month before the disappearance of Jose Alfredo, at a party at the home of reporter Sergio Fimbres, he jokingly said: "Listen, the people and reporters who cover State government tell me that someday they're going to kill al Alfredo". Those present turned to him and said: "What the fuck is wrong with people who say those things?", I spat out. "It's the truth, Luis: look closely at the information that Alfredo has on the narco, it's very delicate," Fimbres replied. We fell silent and no one knew what to say. And that's exactly what happened: no one at *El Imparcial* believed that organized crime would get involved with journalists in Sonora. That´s why there were no course on journalistic security, alerts, self protection, handling of sources or sensitive information, protection manuals, or research protocols. There was nothing. The same nothing we know about Jose Alfredo´s whereabouts.

As I´m saying goodbye, I ask Jorge Morales about a discrepancy between him and Alfredo that I witnessed. According to my memory, it was a delicate note that would not carry the signature of Jose Alfredo so as not to put him at risk . "There is no point for me to have reported all day and not having my name appear" he complained to Jorge, who gave up without thinking that that reporter´s name was already in the killer´s sight. The relationship between Jorge and Alfredo was always like that: the reporter who fought for his work to be published under his name and Jorge who always succumbed to the requests of the reporter. There was no deceit, I´m sure. Just oversights.

DEAR JOSE ALFREDO,

Sonora changed after your disappearance. There is no return. It´s been twelve years without a reporter who dares to investigate the bottom of the drug traffic. It would mean to risk one´s life directly, as it happened to you. I confess that I am one of

those who are afraid to write about the narco and I am not willing to risk any of the members of our Puente Project team with an uncontrolled situation.

Let me tell you, Jose Alfredo, that we are currently going through one of the worst crises of meth consumption in Sonora. In most residential areas there are dumps. The authorities know this, but they are overrun. If you were here, Jose Alfredo, you would have already discovered which cartel is behind the meth boom, and who and how they have allowed crime to become part of the life of the *Sonorenses* as easily as entering through an open door. But you are not here and we dare not investigate. Unfortunately, that was the message left by your disappearance. The latest report on drug trafficking in Sonora was published in 2011 by the correspondent of *Proceso* in Washington, Jesús Esquivel. He documented how Chapo Guzman controlled drug shipments into the United States. The state authorities denied that Sonora was in the hands of the Chapo. But we were there and death overwhelmed us. We miss you, Jose Alfredo.

They say that the worst pain is losing a child. And Don Alfredo, the father, not only lost Jose Alfredo, he doesn´t even know where he is. He has been in tears for twelve years. Twelve years with a knot in his throat. Don Alfredo told me that he has already given up hope on his son being alive. He wants, at least, to know where his body is, because all the dead come back home to say goodbye. Don Alfredo has not stopped his demand for justice, but he is without hope. "We continue to wait for justice or at least to know what happened to my son. We have waited a long time without knowing the truth. It looks like impunity has triumphed. There is no progress in the investigation" Don Alfredo told me the last time I interviewed him on a radio show *Proyecto Puente.* He doesn´t want to talk about it anymore. And I understand. He has nothing else to say that he has not already said in the past 12 years of impunity in his son´s case.

Two years ago, employees of the PGR -the federal attorney´s office- also visited Don Alfredo in Empalme. They told him that they had already exhausted all the lines of inves-

tigation and that they had nothing new. He and his wife, Mrs. Esperanza Mota, were added to the program of Attention to Victims of Kidnapping and Damage, but since then they have not been contacted again. "We have lived in anguish and despair. Every day we hope to hear news that they found him, or anything, I have no idea what to expect. The only thing we want to know is where he is" Don Alfredo told me. The Jiménez Mota family want to close that chapter and get some peace of mind.

Jose Alfredo wanted to be like Jorge Garralda. He was thrilled by the prospect of seeing himself on television like that Azteca TV anchor, in his show *A quien corresponda* -To whom it may concern-. One day Garralda went to Culiacan to give a lecture at the university where Jose Alfredo was studying, and he took a photograph with him. That image is still kept by her mother, Esperanza Mota.

Doña Esperanza, 69 years old, told me that her son came to Sonora to work and be closer to them. That was the main reason. "In Sinaloa, which was more dangerous, nothing happened to him, and here in Sonora, they did not allow him to continue working" said Dona Esperanza, who suffers from diabetes and who has to get injected in her eyes every month because she suffers from cataracts. That injection costs 1,500 pesos, a hole in the salary don Alfredo perceives as a retired railroad worker: 13,000 pesos per month. Doña Esperanza, Don Alfredo and Leticia, their daughter, still live in Empalme. His house is still the same one where Alfredo grew up: on the first street of the Oriente neighborhood, in a sector surrounded by schools.

Dona Esperanza tends to change her tone when she talks about her son. She gets sad. She can not hide the pain she´s been carrying for twelve years. But still she tries to remember.

"Alfredo ate a lot. He liked the shrimp. Whether they were cooked, breaded or in a cocktail. My husband prepared them every time he came. Whenever he visited us he would let go of everything in his hand and go straight to the refrigerator. Please prepare my breakfast, *amá,* I´m very hungry» he would tell me whenever he came by Guaymas and I would start making

eggs with bacon or sausage for him. Up to three sausages. With tortillas and a papaya smoothie.

"Alfredo was very special and had few friends. In fact, he only had two: his cousin Javier Serrano and Marcos Coronado, whom he met in high school. When he came to Empalme, he liked to listen to music and go around with Marcos *El cebollas* and Javier. He drank little alcohol because he had limited time; he had to return to Hermosillo. He came every fortnight. He discarded newspapers and kept many. He left them all here. I threw them away because I did not want to have those memory around. I also gave his clothes away, I gave them to a trash worker who has a body as big as Alfredo; I did not want to have it here anymore. I just kept a plaid navy blue shirt.

"He has been missing for twelve years. It is impossible that he is still alive, but I would like to see him anyway. If they killed him, I would see like to see him dead and give him a Christian burial to close this. It's very sad, I do not wish this on anyone. It is very sad not to know what became of him. They have told us only false stories. "

DEAR JOSE ALFREDO,

Your parents, your colleagues and I regret that your momentum did not allow you to foresee the risks you faced. We can´t bare the fact that it had to cost a life in Sonora, your life, your disappearance, to understand that we could not interfere with the drug traffic. What impotence, José Alfredo. As your *apá* says, you allowed yourself to be carried away by youth and courage. You thought that nothing was going to happen to you because you were a journalist and you believed that there was freedom of expression. "Against the monster of impunity you have to abide by the rules, flies do not enter into a closed mouth" your *apá* said as we parted ways.

We will never stop asking for justice in your name.

Between Fear and Passion

(When the Zetas took over the Isthmus of Tehuantepec)

Martha Izquierdo

IXTEPEC CITY, OAXACA.- I lived the most agonizing hour of my life on October 7th, 2007. That morning three delivery agents from the newspaper *El Imparcial del Istmo* were riddled with bullets in their vehicle, on the Tehuantepec-Salina Cruz road. I got there to cover the event and, right in the middle of the police and the military, I received a phone call.

The next one would be me, the voice said.

He spoke with a northern accent: "Fucking journalist, the next one is you, stop publishing your bullshit or you're going to die!"

I knew they were there mixed among the crowd. The fear paralyzed me and I telephoned Roberto Zamarripa, the deputy director of *Reforma,* the newspaper for which I was a correspondent in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. Zamarripa told me to leave the region to be safe.

Up until that moment I hadn´t confessed to my husband that I had been threatened. The road back to Ciudad Ixtepec -where I lived- was the most difficult in all my years as a journalist. I kept looking back at the mirror thinking they were following me. When I got home I just wanted to lock myself up and never go out again. But I had no choice but to pack my suitcase and run to the Minatitlan airport.

This story, however, had begun several years ago, in the year 2000. Its protagonists had come to Ixtepec -the city where I worked as a journalist- aboard the freight train known as *La Bestia* -the Beast-, on to which tens or hundreds of Central American transmigrants climbed, to cross Mexico on their way to the American dream.

Since 2000, I began to write notes on Central American migration as it passed through the state of Oaxaca, the Isthmus of Tehuantepec and Ciudad Ixtepec, home of a train station where the Beast stopped. It was then that I learned about the gangs of *La Mara Salvatrucha*, the MS13 and the MS18. One of the members of that gang raped a young woman and was arrested. More and more transmigrants were traveling through Ixtepec in search of the American dream and they complained about the attacks of La Mara. That's when I decided to find out more about them.

In January of 2001 I traveled to Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras and met with members of the gang who agreed to an interview. I was afraid but I never showed it. There were people who said it was just stories and they nicknamed me Martha Salvatrucha.

It was not easy to meet them or have them agree to talk, but a person with whom I struck a friendship and who knew them convinced them to do it. I found them at the border between these three countries; to get there we traveled all over Guatemala until we got to *Esquipulas*, and from there to the place where I met five mareros.

I sat among them. They had tears tattooed on their face, a sign of the deaths to their credit. They were from the MS18. I asked them about the assaults the Beast and the raping of women. One of them, perhaps the one with the highest hierarchy because he had more tears tattooed on his face, got up, pulled down his pants and showed me his genitals.

"We give women what they like," he said as he took his penis between his hands and proudly displayed the glans with several pellets wrapped around its skin. He explained that, that way, they could give more pleasure and he glanced over as if looking for the fear on my face. Then he burst out laughing and sat down again.

"That's the way we are, we take the women we like and we strip everything away from the dogs (referring to the transmigrants who travel on the Beast) and those from the MS13, we kill them."

They spoke about their rivalry with the MS13; about their families, about what they call their gang members, of the protection from the authorities in exchange for favors and the fear they sowed in Central America. None of them gave me their name and they only let me take photos of them from their backs. Even so, I appreciated having left that place without any problems, I think they owed favors to the boy who helped me contact them and that´s why I was lucky.

Years later, on May 14th, 2006, the Beast was derailed. The accident occurred in the community of Nizanda, about 20 minutes from Ciudad Ixtepec. There I found a thin person of white complexion, over 65 years old wearing denim trousers and a white t-shirt with a wooden crucifix around his neck. He took out from his pockets a badge that he showed to whoever crossed his way and ran desperately: "I am from the diocese of the ministry of human mobility, I am a priest!", and asked anxiously where the derailment had ocurred. There were already reporters, police and ambulances in Nizanda.

At the insistence of the priest, who identified himself as Jose Alejandro Solalinde Guerra, the police indicated with a signal that the accident was farther ahead and he had to walk. As we approached we saw the bodies of some migrants lying in pieces on both sides of the road between shrubs and spines and authorities that were certifying the remains.

In the place of the derailment the maize that the railroad carried was scattered among parts of human bodies. Four migrants with very serious injuries were taken to the hospital; two people died and the other Central Americans who traveled on the train fled.

From then on I befriended Solalinde. A few months later, on January 10, 2007, he knocked on my door and asked me to cover the abduction of 17 migrants. Still in pajamas I took my cameras and went out to report the facts.

We walked the tracks listening to the testimonies of relatives and witnesses of the kidnapping. Outraged, a group of Central American migrants armed themselves with sticks and

machetes to search for their own. We went to several places, including a house located near the place where the *Hermanos en el Camino* hostel is located today. In another security house the migrants found the evidence: receipts of money transfers, passports, identifications, tools to open train wagons, everything was tossed around in the room; you could tell that the kidnappers had just escaped.

We were struck by the fact that the addresses of the identifications were from Tamaulipas. Municipal police arrived; the migrants asked for help to denounce the facts and showed them the evidence, but that did not matter for the police: they were against the migrants. Amidst the shouts began the detention of the Central Americans. The police took out their guns and I kept capturing those moments with my camera.

Two of the minors took hold of the priest's legs and the policemen severely yanked them to get them inside their patrol car. The commander of the municipal police ordered them to detain the priest. Six municipal policemen attacked Father Solalinde, grabbed him by the throat and put him inside their vehicle, while a detonation of weapons was heard.

I felt the adrenaline rush through my body. I thought that after the priest they would go after me, so I did not stop taking photos until the patrols were lost in the streets. The presbyter and the migrants were locked up in the municipal jail, and from that moment on national attention acknowledged the migratory phenomenon, and the fact that organized crime used migrants to obtain resources through the kidnappings, and this would all precede the San Fernando massacre, Tamaulipas, that occurred on August 24, 2010, where 72 migrants died.

From then on everything changed. It was known that behind the kidnappings of migrants cops and criminals were colluding. Weeks later Father Solalinde began to receive threats. I received the same warnings: I had to abandon that coverage or they would kill me. In telephone calls, they demanded that I stop defending the migrants and stop investigating those issues, and not to get in the way of their business so nothing would happen to me.

Each time the phone rang and I saw an unknown number in the caller ID, I was afraid to answer, my pulse accelerated, my sweat got cold, I wondered how they´d gotten my phone and what else they knew about me. The fear was such that I asked my family not to visit me to avoid putting them at risk. I never knew who was threatening me, but whenever they called I heard men with northern accents, with insults and loud words. I would have preferred to know who they were because whenever I went out to the street I became paranoid looking for their faces whenever I felt someone who following me. I was afraid that at any moment they would fulfill their threat.

One morning, as I finished getting ready, my phone rang insistently,and I asked my husband to answer: they´re calling you for a note, he said; when I answered I heard the threat: "You're not going to play with us you old hag, stop getting in the way of our business or you're going to get killed!" Then they hung me up. I did not say anything to my husband because I did not want to worry him, but the next few weeks I tried to avoid strong publications on the subject, but still documented the mass kidnappings that became more and more frequent.

Months passed and the mass kidnappings continued: the migrants were taken from the railroad tracks at dawn, their family data was extracted and then ransoms of 10, 15 and 20 thousand pesos per person were demanded with the alleged offer to liberate them in the north of the country or in the United States. Many were taken to *Medias Aguas,* Veracruz and those who could not afford to pay were killed. But the worst was yet to happen.

I always thought that the region of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec was far from those scenarios of the north where groups of the organized crime disputed territories. "That does not happen here," I thought as I read the headlines. But in April 2007, when I was a *Reforma* correspondent, things changed.

Several taxi drivers asked me if a special operation was being set up in Juchitán. They explained to me that they had seen men dressed in black clothes arriving in pickups with plates

from other states, asking about the criminals who were holding up people and robbing.

I asked my sources and they denied it. But a week later, the kidnappings, the executions, the clashes with police, and the threats to businessmen and journalists began. The Zetas were actually coming to take over Juchitán. They had recruited these criminals to join their ranks, many of them as lookouts or watchmen.

In Juchitán May is the month of the candles, the nocturnal parties. And yet the population was already afraid of the violence: suddenly the restaurants began to close before nine o'clock in the evening, and the *garnacha* stalls in the portals beneath the municipal palace looked deserted. The nightlife of the city died. It became common place for criminals to enter the homes of wealthy families to carry out their abductions. Fear seized Juchitán to such a degree that the population itself imposed a curfew to not be on the streets after nine o'clock at night. The night trades suffered the worst of their crises because people no longer went out at night.

The kidnappings and the discovery of clandestine graves with human remains became frequent. The Zetas set up look out groups, and used taxi drivers who were threatened if they did not line up with them. They placed two to three people on the main streets, at the entrances to the city and at the bus terminals. The army implemented operation but the violence did not stop.

The atmosphere became ominous in the following months. When it was time to cover violent acts, there was a lot of tension. There was talk of grenades exploding at the headquarters of the regional police, clashes on roads, the appearance of mutilated bodies with messages and abandoned trucks with arsenals. Right in the middle were left the journalists.

The fall of three small airplanes in different points of the Isthmus provoked a reinforcement of the military surveillance. Every day we learned about more abducted people. And reporters received no warning of the risks they were taking. The municipal police had been infiltrated by the Zetas. That is why the commander of the XIII motorized cavalry regiment, based in

Ciudad Ixtepec, General Francisco Aboytes Guerra, had to coordinate with the state police in the fight he undertook against the Mafia.

I knew I was in danger when I heard my name being mentioned in front of the Zetas. After an operation in which people who had been kidnapped were freed and several organized crime informants were arrested, reporters were covering the presentation of the detainees with extreme caution: only photographs. But on that occasion, inside the regiment, a commander - now deceased - said my surname, and did so on purpose.

Shortly afterwards a security house in Tehuantepec, a city about 40 kilometers from Ixtepec, fell. They found a list of names: there were some national correspondents, one regional, and me. They had our complete data and telephone numbers. We were assigned to be killed. That was in the month of August.

Then the telephone threats returned: "you're going to die! Stop publishing information about us, you're going to bite the dust you fucking journalist! "

Suddenly the roads in the Isthmus region became the scene of clashes between assassins and military, but fear kept me from covering those incidents.

In September the situation was already very difficult. Many colleagues self-censored themselves for fear of becoming victims of organized crime; others spoke of intimidating calls and messages warning them not to cover or publish anything about the Zetas.

On October 7th, the most distressing hour of my life arrived: that morning I went to the road to cover the story of the three newspaper dispatchers that had been executed inside a car and the phone call, while I took pictures, where they warned me that the next one was me.

I handed my phone over to the deputy prosecutor Maria del Carmen Chiñas but the criminals had already hung up. The deputy director of *Reforma,* Roberto Zamarripa, ordered me to leave the Isthmus and it wasn´t until that moment that I confessed to my husband that they were threatening me. I had no

choice but to pack my suitcase and leave for the Minatitlán airport. The directors of the newspaper had made the decision to remove me from the Isthmus to live in Mexico City, to safeguard my life and continue working.

On October 8th, 2007, I left the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. Other colleagues were not so lucky. Although they were threatened, they did not receive the support of their news outlets. Others decided to go away on their own at the risk of death.

It was not easy to leave everything behind because you still live with the anguish that at any moment someone will fulfill the threat of killing you. With fear on my skin, I went out to work in Mexico City, always distrustful of the staring eyes of others and always thinking that they could attack me. Weeks passed and I decided that I could not live in fear. After discussing it with my bosses, two months later I returned to the Isthmus.

Going back was not easy. I scarcely went out, and kept a low profile. Once again I decided that I could not live that way and changed up my life again. The telephone threats came back but I did not give them any importance. I stopped covering organized crime because the newspaper no longer required that information and I focused on social issues.

Then came a time when I wondered if I wanted to continue in journalism knowing the risks it involved. I answered that yes, that this was what I wanted to do forever. It wasn´t about being a heroine or facing the bad guys, I simply wanted to exercise the right to freedom of expression that we all have.

The violent situation continued the same way for two more years, kidnappings of migrants, and of people in the region, until they began to detain the lieutenants in military operations.

In 2010 things calmed down a bit, although kidnappings still ocurred, they began to dismantle the bands of the plagiarists. In the year 2012 I paused working in journalism. My husband was diagnosed with a very advanced cancer: they gave him only six months of life and I dedicated myself to being with him until May 20, 2013, when he died.

After his death, I resumed my journalistic life and covered the caravan of migrants that left on June 1, 2014, from Ciudad Ixtepec to Mexico. We walked 20 kilometers to Juchitán with Father Solalinde and the migrants. In buses we arrived at the Senate and CNDH, in Mexico City, so that the migrants could be heard and the violence that they suffer in their passage through the country be known.

I became a correspondent for the *El Imparcial* newspapers of Oaxaca and the Isthmus, and also for 97.7 radio news center in Oaxaca and produced my own news show at 100.7 news on *Bianii Luu Nezaa* Radio (a light on the way).

Life had yet to offer me my greatest challenge: on May 17, 2015, I was diagnosed with stage 4 ovarian cancer, and from then on I had four surgeries, 13 chemotherapy, four vaccines and two cardiorespiratory arrests, and in all that time I never stopped doing journalism, after each surgery I took care of myself for 20 days and, after every chemo, I was careful not to be exposed to the sun but continued with the news.

Two years and three months after a diagnosis that gave me just a few months to live I'm still here doing what I like and I'm passionate about, no cancer anymore, at the stage of remission and recovering from the last surgery, doing journalism on radio, and being a correspondent for the gender journalism agency Semmexico.

Today I know that if I were to be born again I would choose to be a journalist.

KEEPING STILL

Maricarmen Aguilar Franco

Luvianos, hot area of the State of Mexico.- We are journalists from a region known as *Tierra Caliente -hot area-*, where the State of Mexico, Michoacán and Guerrero converge. Here you can find small populations whose names have circled around the world due to tragic news: Luvianos, Tlatlaya, San Miguel Totolapan and Francisco J. Múgica. We are more than 30 reporters who practice journalism in the local media. We were already here before the area became a risk zone for journalists.

The violence escalated about 10 years ago. Several journalists and local media workers have been the protagonists of these dramatic episodes. The rest of us have become accustomed to living in fear, to not to feel it, to not express it, let alone admit it, to "keep still" as if nothing disturbs us.

We talk very little about violence; we lower our voice like those who dare to mention the lords. We no longer think about writing what we have seen or heard. That is practically impossible, they are stories of deaths, crimes, corruption and complicities; most are hidden, kept in silence, because they have condemned us to a form of total self-censorship to survive.

Staying here is a complicated decision. Our families suffer the anxiety and annoyance of our work; trying to survive in journalism is not an act of courage, even though many consider it is. When we mention the region where we work to other colleagues, they look astonished, incredulous, and say, "how brave!" But it is not an enviable situation, and many simply call us crazy, reckless or too dumb for running such risks.

At the *Tierra Caliente* sooner or later you adjust to the "new social order" defined by characters who, with fear and

respect, everyone calls "the lords", "the true authorities." The result has been positive: they do not mess with us and we do not get into their way. If there is a problem we all know the consequences. The rules are very clear for both sides. The same happens with the other "authorities", the institutional ones, those of officials and politicians from whom we also receive constant aggressions. In the list of aggressors follow the editors, owners and media bosses; even our own colleagues themselves have their own forms of aggression.

My work in *Tierra Caliente* began in 1998 at *Mi Región*, a local weekly in Tejupilco, State of Mexico; from that time on everyone addresses me with amazement "Doesn´t it scare you? You can get killed there you know"; and so it was, the news of dead people in parties of all kinds was a constant: violent deaths in several localities and ranches provoked by quarrels, fights with machetes or pistols, or by punches! They were the result of lawsuits for inheritances, crimes of passion, even unpaid bets, or they were simply in a bad mood.

The subject of marijuana began to recur. Invited by the Army or the Office of the Attorney General of the Republic we went to see the destruction of plantations. The state attorney's office always denied the existence of *mariguaneros*; they had rarely been detained and there was no mention of cartels or big drug traffickers; it was traditional, local and low-scale production, drug trafficking, they said, not drug traffickers. No one realized exactly when the stage was transformed.

Our problems arose with uncomfortable notes of a different nature. One time I got to the newsroom and there was a great fuss; Samuel Jaimes, en editor who had recently acquired the newspaper, had been detained in the morning. I had just gotten a diploma on defense of Freedom of Expression and Human Rights from the Iberoamericana university, and perhaps that´s what gave me enough courage to go to the public ministry and demand the immediate release of my boss.

"Are you a lawyer?" They asked. When I said I wasn´t they simply tried to ignore me: they would not release the edi-

tor because he did not want to reveal who was the author of the column "El Huarachudo" that was published in the weekly newspaper. Thus we learned the reason for his arrest: a director, annoyed by a commentary in those lines, moved her influences to intimidate Samuel Jaimes, who not give up the name of the columnist. In the end, the columnist was taken off the paper and I had no arguments to defend him; I felt like a failure.

Years passed. I moved around peacefully through all the municipalities of the south of the state of Mexico with my colleagues. The tours were intense and we had no fear of riding on the road at midnight or staying in some *rancheria* if it was too late.

In 2003, a National Congress of Journalists was held in Ixtapan de la Sal. Among the audience I saw Don Félix García Anaya, editor of ***El Monitor de Tejupilco*.** He came to make a complaint and to show the traces of the blows he had received from Crescencio Suarez Escamilla, a local deputy from the PRD party, who had violently entered the small office of the newspaper, and attacked him and another reporter, Lilia Olascoaga. I wrote for the newspaper of Toluca. My note on that attack was rejected. "It's not relevant," they told me. That aggression is still unpunished.

By that time, aggressions to our colleagues were daily anecdotes and we made them "part of the trade". We learned to justify the aggressors, from simple readers to highly regarded local politicians, leaders, officials, or police officers ... anyone could show their disagreement by assaulting us in any way just because we were reporters or dispatchers.

One time, Hugo Garcia was arrested while dispatching and distributing the newspaper *El Informante* in the municipality of San Mateo Atenco. I had written a report about corruption in the town hall and the mayor ordered the policemen to arrest him; he spent two days in the municipal jail. The dispatchers went through similar situations countless times. They were bullied, got all their newspapers snatched, or were simply threatened while demanding they not to sell any copies.

By 2010 Don Félix García Anaya planned to turn *El Monitor de Tejupilco* into a unique regional newspaper despite the fact that he had already suffered severe attacks: express kidnapping, extortion, beatings and torture. But something tremendous truncated the project: in the municipality of Ocuilán, Angel Castillo Corona, a colleague, and his son were murdered; he was a pillar and key piece to achieve the transformation form a weekly into a newspaper. Officially it was deemed an assault. In the newspaper *Mi Región* the director's recommendation were that we should not to "beat" anyone: "take care of the newspaper economy" and think about your families; virtually all the newspapers in the State of Mexico live from advertisement deals with state and municipal governments. Therefor my reports were toned down.

By 2008, the narco was a recurring issue, the "Familia Michoacana" cartel and "Los Zetas" made headlines everyday; constant clashes made our hair stand on end; multiple witnesses told gory stories. By then the number of journalists killed in the country was large but in our small territory we acted as if we were very far away from that reality. Only Jorge Diaz Navarro in *"The Monitor"* was encouraged to write about the narco: he published names and specific data; we couldn´t believe such boldness.

In that year the confrontations intensified, the criminals became more visible, the news of kidnappings, disappearances, executed or killed people were a constant in the region. They slaughtered cattlemen, priests, policemen, politicians, teachers, doctors; not even during the electoral season did the fighting stop. Before our eyes they fired and at our feet fell the wounded or the dead.

There was only one newspaper that published details on the narcos of the southern part of the State of Mexico: in the weekly *Nuestro tiempo*, texts of Francisco Cruz Jiménez, author of the book La tierra narca -The Narco earth-. Like Miguel Ángel Alvarado he saw this region of Tierra Caliente as a key point in the negotiations between the government and organized crime.

This is a fragment: "It is 2013 and in Toluca a meeting between drug traffickers ends with a request: to hand over the city of Iguala to *La Familia Michoacana* and ten million dollars. Those who negotiate are the son of Joaquín El Chapo Guzmán, the leader of *La Familia Michoacana* in the State of Mexico and a couple with the surnames Pineda Villa ... "

The founder of the weekly "*Nuestro tiempo*", Selene Hernández León investigated these issues in depth; in October of 2010 she was found dead in a hotel at the center of Toluca; the official version of suicide was not entirely credible, and the news of the tragic end of a journalist involved in those scabrous matters practically went unnoticed, except for a small note on her life and career.

In 2012 Luis Enrique Granillo Martínez founded the Popular Revolutionary Front Francisco Villa (FPRFV) and began a "Productive Revolution" that confronted the interests of "the lords." He then called for the formation of self-defense groups. I joined them as a correspondent for the FPRFV; at first, the media was generous with us, but on February 16, 2013 the young leader of that movement was abducted alongside his comrade Tarcisio Madronio; an armed command picked them up two days after they gave a press conference in Tejupilco on the self-defense groups. They are still missing.

Clashes raged: *Los caballeros templarios* -the Knights Templars- and *Guerreros Unidos* -United Warriors- gained ground; the *Familia Michoacana* wasn´t going to allow this, while the *Zetas* were leaving a bloody trail and dramatic traces among the population. According to an email sent by the inhabitants of Luvianos, the Zetas held them between terror, anguish and death: "Unfortunately the reason for our communication is not very encouraging. Our municipality is going through moments of anguish and much fear since our town has been taken over by the Zetas.We have been living in curfew for months, at night we can not leave our homes because they kill us.The only thing that that breaks the silence of the empty streets are the shots of confrontations among themselves and the local narcos ".

The newspapers in Tejupilco "kept quiet and silence." If we ran into them in an event and by mistake or distraction took photos of "the lords", they would send us a nice message asking us to erase everything, to keep two or three photos that were indispensable for our note, where, of course, they themselves did not appear, that´s how considerately they behaved.

Once we witnessed a confrontation in the municipal head; another time in the community of *Caja de agua* we saw two young men wounded who fell down, just at a spot where several reporters covered a proselytizing act; they once erased all the photos of the Luvianos Soccer League championship from my camera, just because at the end of the awards ceremony that war between cartels that has not yet ended and has taken thousands of lives in the region, including dozens of fallen soldiers with names and hidden stories, formally began.

On November 20, 2013 Radio *Calentana Mexiquense* began broadcasting, a small community radio in Luvianos created by Indalecio Benítez Mondragón; the project had been considered since the National Congress of Indigenous Communicators, and details were refined and procedures got under way. The broadcasts began and the audience grew significantly, alongside its programming and expectations.

On August 2, 2014 a command raided the small station, which was also the home of Indalecio Benitez. It was past midnight, Indalecio had gone out to dinner with his family after successfully completing the first program with live music. Returning in his car he noticed the armed men inside his house and accelerated. He was traveling with his wife and four young children -he heard shots and did not stop. Instead he went to the nearby Navy barracks to ask for help.

His 12-year-old son Juan Diego died that night with three bullet wounds. The journalists of the region did not come to support him, neither did those in Toluca. Almost all the Mexican journalists created a total vacuum, only a few companions from the valley of Toluca and one from Tejupilco showed any solidarity; only international organizations spoke out; a Spanish jour-

nalist and a photographer from Mexico City accompanied me to Luvianos to support the family and the radio announcers.

After that fatal aggression many more attacks came cascading down. Then came the institutional aggression from the three levels of government and various dependencies, from the Navy itself, which, acted very slowly, and allowed the criminals to flee, and who then returned to the house of Indalecio to threaten his 84 year old mother, and to his 17 year old son. Indalecio did not know the reason for the attack; it was national news but no one came to protect his family, and the funeral of Juan Diego took place with the absolute absence of any security forces. Juan Diego was buried in Luvianos three days later.

While mourning the body of little Juan Diego the radio, of only 20 watts, kept transmitting. A taxi was constantly lurking in front of the house, the same as Friday night, witnesses said; few journalists from Toluca came to cover the funeral. In the evening, journalist Majo Siscar and photographer Paryka Benitez hid in a small car Indalecio with his wife, his 17-year-old son and the three little ones, Gabriel, Pablo and Perla, to shelter them in another house. Although we intended to protect them, our colleagues considered this a reckless and risky act.

I stayed with the parents and brothers of Indalecio in the patio of the house, we looked towards the street where we saw the taxi several times. Each time we saw it our heart seemed to stop; we watched the candles lit on the floor and prayers were not for Juan Diego but for us. That aggression left us with many emotional scars.

The director of the state police assured everyone in a television interview that there were policemen present, "but undercover"; mockery and aggression again, what indolence! Indalecio received support in Mexico City from international organizations of journalists, the competent authorities took a month and a half to give the benefits of protection to him, his wife and children; the institutional aggressions did not end there, on the

contrary, they increased, the radio transmitted daily; the support of the migrants was poignant, the audience recovered and also the trust in Indalecio, despite the automatic criminalization directed at the victims or survivors of such cases.

The following year brought another aggression for *Radio Calentana.* In October of 2015 the Federal Institute of Telecommunications, together with army personnel and the PGR closed the radio station and seized the equipment. Indalecio held a sit-in against the IFT. He demanded that his ongoing procedures be respected in order to obtain the radio concession; he was still displaced in a shelter provided by the Mechanism for Protection of Journalists and Human Rights Defenders, while the station in Luvianos was guarded by several elements of the state police, who guarded the place day and night.

A month later another inconceivable aggression occurred. On November 4, the Government of the State of Mexico issued a press bulletin that criminalized Indalecio, the radio and all its announcers, who had gradually reintegrated into programming. In this statement the government justified the closure of the radio because "its announcers encourage people to support criminal groups related with organized crime."

The immediate response was given again by international organizations such as the UN and the IACHR. The Human Rights Commission demanded clarification from the state government and accused it of putting the entire team of collaborators of the Radio at risk. Journalist organizations expressed concern about this criminalization, requesting the repair of damage to the station and public apologies.

On June 7, 2016, the government of the state of Mexico issued an extension where it recognized the radio project of Indalecio Benitez. It was a way of exculpating him from the accusation in an unfortunate bulletin; unfortunately the repair of the damages was not fulfilled in full.

The IFT unanimously authorized the granting of community social use to *Radio Calentana* on June 8, 2016. Indalecio Benítez returned to his village with his family and continued with his radio project.

Aggressions are so common, constant and "natural" that few of us can detect and classify them as attacks on our person and profession. We think that it is a minor problem to receive "veiled threats", "kind warnings", "cordial invitations to keep quiet and silent", as it has happened to me and several of my colleagues in the area, and also to press distributors and even printers, one of them who, upon arriving at the workshop, was intercepted by a group of thugs who gave him a very clear message from "the lords": they did not want to see him there again or it would end up very badly for him and his family.

We do not know how, who and where they could be watching and listening in, but we have already learned to "keep quiet": to shut up, to look and turn to other side, and if necessary, to ignore what is happening, who is speaking, who looks, who falls in front of us, and understand the subjects that we should never address in our notes or columns, even in our own private talks; and know when to turn off our cameras and recorders and erase our memories.

Paradoxically, a Law for the Protection of Journalists in the state of Mexico has been discussed for years, and the text is laughable. The people who drew up this initiative have no idea of the latent risk of our work and the complexity of the journalistic exercise in an area like this, where we are in the midst of a deaf, invisible war, whose wake is formed by thousands of deaths, thousands of widows, orphans and unprotected elders. Of all this we can not write yet, we do not want to do it, nor would we be allowed to; fear invaded us, even if we ignore it and do not recognize it within us; and our protective weapon is silence, "keeping still" and wait for better times to return to our commitment to the truth.

How we learned to shut up

Kowanin Silva

I

WE ALREADY KNOW WHERE YOU LIVE, FAT COW. WE ARE GOING TO BUTCHER YOU AND THROW YOU OUT IN NAKED LITTLE PIECES, OUTSIDE THE MARBELLA JUST LIKE WE DID WITH VALENTIN...

January 8, 2010.
That day was a snowy morning.

A call woke me at dawn with the news that Valentín Valdés, a shrewd reporter, who worked for a competing newspaper, and a former college friend of mine, had been killed. I could not sleep anymore. I defrosted my windshield and drove to my office. In addition to snow, I saw some of the headlines in the kiosk´s journals: "Reporter from Saltillo executed".

Valentin had been left at the door of the Marbella Motel. His body showed signs of having been tortured. They left a message that would never be revealed. A week earlier, the army had detained a member of the Gulf Cartel in that motel. And, although all the news outlets had covered the event, Valentin had investigated further than anyone.

In those years, the cartel warfare that broke out in the city made us aware of more than just the dead people: disloyal reporters, who changed their broken old cars for 4x4 pickups, reporters who carried radios worth more than one hundred thousand pesos that could track the frequency of the police and drug traffickers; reporters who, in each uncomfortable piece of

reporting for the cartel they served, took away and erased their photographers´ memory cards, copied the material and warned their colleagues: "If something comes out, I´ll know who it was, bastards." They were not infiltrators. They were treacherous reporters who had sold their souls to the cartel and determined what was or not to be published. They were inside our newsrooms. They had our phones, our addresses. We were surrounded. The newspaper managers were afraid to fire them and we could only try to avoid them. It is very likely that these traitors gave up Valentin. Because Valentin was not like them. Valentin was the geek boy of the class, the president of the school's student society, the noble and responsible son who supported his parents, the honest reporter. We were never friends but we respected each other. The last time I saw him was that day when we covered the story at the Marbella motel. Then I was only left with an image of him: shrouded, unrecognizable.

As I was saying, the mail that came that afternoon read:

> WE ALREADY KNOW WHERE YOU LIVE FAT COW. WE ARE GOING TO BUTCHER YOU AND THROW YOU OUT IN NAKED LITTLE PIECES, OUTSIDE THE MARBELLA JUST LIKE WE DID WITH VALENTIN... IF YOU DO NOT GO BACK TO YOUR RANCH YOU WILL DIE. WE HAVE YOU LOCATED. YOU AND YOUR LESBIAN FRIEND, WITH WHOM YOU LIVE IN THE CENTER. COMMANDER MATEO Z

I listened to my fear. Go back to my ranch, cool down, get out of the game, as they say. The hideaway was a friend's hostel. His living room was full of books. It was there that the best of guardians, Angas and Mangas, lived: a German shepherd and a labrador who were pure love.

In a month, my fear subsided. I called the newsroom and told them I'd be back. Before leaving, I went to the town´s cyber café to check my mail. And again, there they were.

WE ALREADY KNOW THAT YOU ARE IN CREEL FAT COW, DON´T EVEN THINK ABOUT COMING BACK. I AM THE COMMANDER MATEO OF THE ZETAS AND YOU HAVE BEEN WARNED

I do not know how to do anything other than be a journalist. So I went back to Coahuila.

II

I´ve been haunted by stories since I was a child. Sinking in the armchair of grandpa´s house was like climbing on an infinite train and figuring out how the railroad gave life to Torreon and nurtured my Grandfather, who had been orphaned at the age of ten. I could spend hours on that journey until nightfall, when he spoke of vigilantes and bandits, of good and evil, until grandma interrupted: "Leave the girl alone. Now come and have dinner."

Over the years, searching for stories became my trade. In 2004, when I first stepped into a newsroom, I felt as if I had won at bingo: I could not believe that I was going to be paid to report and write. Five thousand pesos a month was the deal, ten hours a day, without gas, phone or car. But I still felt I should be paying them.

So I went in search of those stories that Grandpa had told me: I preferred those of bandits and their victims. I spoke with the most dangerous killer of women in the Laguna area; in the Golden Triangle, I discovered marijuana fields that were within plain sight of the military; I chatted with the children of a hostel in Baborigame, Chihuahua, while their parents were away for weeks scratching poppy seeds; I published a map of the most popular drug outlets in the city, which included an infographic of the chemical analysis of the merchandise.

Being a journalist felt like paradise. Then, 2005 came and everything began to go to hell. In that year, President Vicente Fox launched the Transparency Act in all the states. And I, like many reporters in the country, started asking for the simplest

information: for example, asking the mayor how much he spent on advertising, his expense balance and who his suppliers were. Nothing risky, I thought. But a little while after, my phone rang. It was the director of Social Communication of the city council. He spoke in a flattering tone, praising my job, and then he invited me to have coffee to talk about my request for information.

-I have nothing to talk about, I said. What I need is for you to respond to the request.

-Let's talk it over coffee, Miss.

I replied that I didn´t drink coffee with government officials, and then his tone got cold:

-I need you to retract your information request in writing" he ordered.

-Are you crazy?" I said because I could think of nothing else.

-I already spoke with your boss and you're going to retract, in writing.

-Even if my boss asks me to, I won´t do it.

The guy grunted and then warned me that I would regret it. "You're going to see who wins!" he said and hung up.

He won: the newspaper decided not to dig further into the matter because an advertising debt of 1.5 million pesos was at stake. That day, I knew what silence meant. And I thought, What would my grandfather say now?

III

It wasn't until Tuesday that I missed him. One of the reporters I was in charge of – who I'll call Jose – had not attended the meeting that I usually have every day. I thought he was tired: he had not slept for several days and had failed to hand in a risky investigation that unraveled the route of oil theft in the Saltillo-Monterrey section of the rig. Jose is one of those reporters who usually writes in the newsroom until dawn, who is always excited when he sees his name on the cover, and who learns from corrections by writing more than three drafts. A dying breed of reporter and, on Tuesday, he did not show up.

His phone went straight to mailbox. His roomie had lost contact with him ever since Sunday, and the car he drove, which belonged to the paper, was still parked around the corner. The prosecutor searched his things and suggested it was a suicide. He even staged a fake operation to look for Jose's body in a nearby stream. Jose was still missing.

Ten hours later, still bundled with nerves and fear, trying to figured out the statement we were going to release to report the disappearance, I received a call from Jose's cell phone.

-Are you ok? Where are you? I asked, hoping it was Jose's voice.

"Yes, I was thrown out on the road and walked to Concha del Oro." His voice sounded ragged, as if he hadn't slept in years. "A family helped me."

I asked for his location so as to go pick him up, but that night Jose had no idea even where north was. I told him to just walk to the village church and that we would meet him there. The owner of the newspaper wanted to go pick up Jose as soon as I told the directors, but he was not allowed to go. So, it was Alejandro, the editorial assistant, who accompanied me. We notified the authorities that Jose had appeared, and that we would pick him up. The prosecutor advised us not to travel alone and assigned us a group of escorts, who were accountable to the Attorney Deputy. "You will go with my best people," the prosecutor told me.

I just wanted to get Jose, because the blame was getting to me. How had it occurred to us to publish an investigation about the mafia of Huachicoleros, which was operating in Coahuila? It was 2008: the mafia ran the city, and it was letting us know.

Alejandro and I were in the car, accompanied by an escort who did not even carry an explorer's knife. Behind us, in a Suburban van, was the Deputy Attorney and six, seven officers, dressed in civilian clothes, armed to the teeth. In fact, the first part of their plan was to steer clear of a check point at the entrance to Zacatecas, because the escorts were not allowed to use

weapons in another jurisdiction. We started off in a caravan and, just outside the city, the Suburban van reached us and one of the officers ordered us to stop. The Attorney Deputy came down and told us: "My superiors are telling me that it is not safe for me to go with you, but do not worry. You are accompanied by the best." I felt afraid, and my stomach was suddenly upset.

It was night already when we took to the road. Alexander stepped on the gas and I prayed. We cleared the check point and, just ahead, at the curve where you enter Concha del Oro, we stopped. The officer who accompanied us got out and went to the Suburban van to get his weapons. He came back and took hold of the wheel. He was to remain alert within the car and keep some distance from us. I remember driving up through a long, seemingly endless avenue. It was midnight, and no car nor soul was in the street waiting for us. Just us.

"Where is the church?" asked the officer. I told him that I had never been here, and that he should just drive up ahead, to see what we would find. And what we found was that this town should have had the world record for the number of churches a town could have in a single street. At some point we came upon one more church and, on the other corner across from it, we saw a parked black Hummer, with polarized glass.

"What do we do?" asked the officer, with the face of a frightened child.

"You're the one who knows. Don't scare me," I said.

"Go down to look for him then."

"How?"

"Just get out and see if you can find your partner."

Neither Alexander nor I got out. The Hummer was a bad omen. We drove around the church and found Joseph there. He was seated, crouched with his arms around his ankles, with a backpack. I got out to help him, and he quickly climbed into the back of the car and took hold of my hand. He squeezed it so hard that I felt his fear. He didn´t let go of it until we got back.

During the journey, José spoke very little. He said he had been kidnapped outside his home, that they covered his face, but

did not hurt him. He said that they held him for two days, and that they let him know that it was all his fault for researching the *cachimbas*, the clandestine diesel shops. They only uncovered his face for a moment when a man, who said he was "the boss", stood in front of him and warned him: "Take a good look so you will not forget who's in charge, you bastard."

That night, I returned home at three in the morning. I lived alone. Just as I closed the door, I started to cry.

IV

I have no voice left. I am a northerner, judoka, a tall, sturdy woman and so strong that I can lift a gas tank with one hand. But today I have been silenced. I'm calling the editorial director to ask for help, and my voice does not react. It's like those nightmares where you want to scream but can´t. This is not a dream. Hard as a try to move my mouth and walk from side to side and breathe, I can´t make a sound. Only tears come. I guess this is what silence is. It's Christmas, I´m reminded. It's Christmas. Can there be a more sinister silence? We have heard bullets, we have heard the cries of the mothers who can´t find their children, and we have remained silent, just as we were ordered.

I'm still speechless. I hang up. I send him messages through a Blackberry.

-I can´t speak, It´s better to tell you in here.

-What happened?

-Commander Wolf called me. He said, "Kowanin?" and I said, "Yes." I thought it was a friend who was calling to congratulate me. He said: "I am the Zeta´s Wolf commander. I'm just calling to wish you a Merry Christmas. Just keep on going with your little magazine and see how it goes."

-What did you publish?

-Nothing, we have not published anything.

I had a full house. My family had arrived that day from Chihuahua when they learned that, because of my workload, I would not be able to take a vacation. Turkey, tamales, cheese,

wine, gifts, hugs. That´s the way the night was unfolding until that call fucked everything.

I ran through every page of last month´s newspaper in my mind. What had made him angry this time? What could be so serious, to put me in the mind of a Zeta bastard, just at the beginning of Christmas?

The first thing I remembered was a report that we had published in the weekly investigative journal – the one I manage – about a beauty salon, which served as a front for a whore house. When the reporter gave it to me, I resisted. In the end, I read it: it had reuqired hours of street work and hours of writing, but the story was good and it hooked readers. Following my own set of guidelines, I edited out all possible risks: addresses, names, and details. It became a story that could have happened anywhere in the world. It did not work: they knew my Nextel radio number, which I didn´t even know myself; they knew my name and surnames; and they knew that I was editing the journal.

That morning, the head of the newspaper spoke with the prosecutor. The order was to meet with Commander X: he would take care of my problem. I had some information that Commander X served as a go between with organized crime. I never spoke with him. I locked myself up for two days in my house and it got worse. It was like being in a cage. With so much time to think and, guided by my intuition, I put together a plan, arguing that the State was colluding with organized crime: I would hold the State´s Attorney responsible if something happened to me. I would tell him that I had already talked to the agencies dedicated to the protection of journalists and the international media. My intention was not to be protected by them, but to make sure he knew what I meant so that he would calm down these people – his people – or God knows what would happen. The prosecutor told me: "I do not see any risk; I do not think you have to leave."

A few days later, we planned the best new year´s eve party in a very long time.

V

The day that the PRI appointed Humberto Moreira Valdés as its national leader, Saltillo lost its only chance at peace. It was March 4, 2011, and on the busiest avenue, police and gunmen exchanged gunfire for an hour. They pursued each other through avenues off-limits to anyone who cared to stay alive, in the darkest hours, in a city that Moreira had boasted was untouchable. People locked themselves in their homes, and reporters assigned to monitor the police dove into the shootout without vests or life insurance.

That night, the state government called a press conference. By that time, panic was everywhere, and no reporter or editor showed up for the conference. Everyone was thinking the same thing: What if they attack Government Palace?

And yet, the editorial director and I did go. He took the photographs while I videotaped and wrote the notes. When I decided to go back home, I couldn't find my keys. I'm usually pretty absent-minded, but that day I was at distracted beyond all measure. I looked for them all over the paper. In the bathrooms, in the camera case, in the car. Nothing. My paranoia rose. I thought, What if they already know where I live? What if they stole them at the press conference? I went to a hotel. It was two o'clock in the morning and I was ashamed to call on my friends at that late hour. I didn't sleep. Instead, I spent the night vomiting. I think it was the paranoia; paranoia from a long time ago.

The next day, I arrived at the newspaper in the same clothes. I was looking for a locksmith when they called for a meeting. "The leader of the plaza" had called. A guy who had been phoning the newspaper for some time with his best shot at an editorial line or just to tell us his version of the events. "The leader of the plaza" had left a message for me: "You think you´re fucking smart? I saw you asking questions at the press conference yesterday. Keep it up and no one is going to defend you, not even the Feds." I was the smart ass questioner.

How easy it is to disarm a journalist in the north. There is always someone to tell you what you can't ask, what you can't investigate or publish, what you should leave alone. And what do you do if they know everything about you – where you live, who your friends are? They know what hurts you the most.

I no longer remember where I found my keys, but I showered and slept for more than half a day. I think it was the fear of a long time ago.

VI

May 30, 2011. Period of elections for Governor.

I heard what I thought was thunder as I waited for the light to turn green. I thought it was a transformer and I kept driving to my house. Soon thereafter they called me from the newspaper: "They threw a grenade at us. Come back and help us finish the latest issue." The grenade had exploded right in between the editorial director's car and the police chief's. It was midnight and there wasn't a soul on the street. Luckily, there was only material damage: windows, building facades, a few cars. What it destroyed was the peace of mind of the more than a hundred people who work in our newsroom.

The police never came. But a handful of Zetas, who said they weren't taking responsibility for the attack, showed up. "We did not do it, boss," they told the director. "Whatever you need we can help with." The Army surfaced an hour and a half later. It was a day to be reminded of how truly alone we are.

Months later, they found some suspects. They confessed to throwing the grenade only to see what would happen. They didn't know how to use it and were just experimenting.

VII

February 2014
COMTE MATEO:
@kowanin WHERE DO YOU WANT MARIO'S HEAD

When I read the tweet I laughed. I laughed because it had been a long time since we had investigated the narco (after too many jabs back and forth, we had come to understand that no article is worth a life). And I laughed because, being a journalist in Coahuila, taught me that, when the lowlifes want something, they don't Tweet: they call you on your cell directly and, if you ignore them, they kidnap a colleague. That´s how they control the editorial pages.

Fear started drowning my laughter. On this occasion, it was not only about me, but also about my boyfriend, a two-meter-tall giant. The giant with whom I travel to the desert to watch the Milky Way, with whom I dance in the kitchen while boiling water for the pasta, and with whom I allow my corny side to come out unabashed. I decided to report it. I called the Mechanism for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders and Journalists and, on the next day, I had two women interviewing me. It took me a whole day to tell them my story: they didn't even know what Twitter was. "This seems to come from the government," one of them told me. They said they would send me a panic button.

Months later, two other people from that organization came to my newsroom. We repeated the interview, although this time we didn't need to explain Twitter. They apologized for the delay, saying that "administrative changes" had gotten in the way. But they swore that, now, I was a top priority. They took pictures of everything in my house; they counted doors and windows. They were measuring the risk, they said. And they assured me that the panic button was on its way.

A year went by and nothing. Then a young lady came to the newsroom. She was employed by a security equipment agency and had flown to Saltillo to give me the panic button.

"A year, Miss, a year?" I said. "Do you know what could have happened if I lived in Veracruz? This is how you protect journalists? Take it back, I won't accept it."

"I understand," she said, "but I can't take it back. I only work for the company that manufactures the equipment. I

brought it just to explain how it works. If you want to return it, you have to call the company and have them pick it up."

It seemed worse than canceling a credit card.

To make matters worse, the panic button was connected to State and not to the Federal authorities, as I had demanded. I asked her to make the change.

"I can't change anything, Miss. People from the company would have to come to do that."

I kept he panic button. I turned it off, and left it without a battery locked inside my desk. Carrying it with me was like giving them a lock-in on my GPS. After six months of calling them, people finally came from the company to pick it up. Before they left, they invited me to an event at Chapultepec Castle, where they wanted me to recount my story as proof of how well the panic button worked.

I didn't accept. It wasn't until I filled out endless sheets of paperwork that they finally took the button back.

Just two years later, in February 2017, I received a summons: they needed me in Torreón: they needed me to take a psychological examination. Their argument was that, in order to close the case completely, they needed more paperwork, and there weren't any experts in Saltillo to carry out the examination. Out of curiosity I asked how long the exam took. "Two to three hours," they replied.

I´m still here. I've never found the time to get to Torreón

THE CRIME BEAT PHOTOGRAPHER

Laura Sánchez Ley

Her cell phone rang as she drove to her children's school. Ángeles García held the steering wheel in one hand, and with the other, she grabbed the phone while at the same time looking out of the corner of her eye into the rearview mirror to keep the children from fighting.

Angeles, 50 years old was, in that November of 2008, a photographer with no fixed job and just divorced. She had left her husband, also a photographer, because he was a drunk and a womanizer. She left work because of the lascivious looks and crude intentions of her bosses. Angeles worked in the people section of *El Mexicano,* a government newspaper whose owner is a PRI union leader. For more than a decade, Ángeles photographed the tijuanense jet-set parties. But now she was unemployed and without a husband.

-Hello? Ángeles answered the cell phone.

"Do you still want the job?"

The voice was from the director of *El Sol de Tijuana*, a former PGR official who had been accused of corruption, but was protected by newspaper owner Mario Vázquez Raña. The director wore a trimmed, square-shaped mustache, just like Hitler. Angels had met the Hitler from Tijuana just three months earlier, when she went to the newspaper to apply for a job. On that occasion, after climbing the five stories of the horrible pink building, Ángeles entered Hitler's office, explained her virtues and needs and he replied: "Look: I do not like to work with women; unless one of my photographers dies, I´ll look for you. "

"Yes, I still need the job" Angels replied to Hilter on the phone.

"Well, what do you think?" A photographer just died.

*

The barrel, from which smoke still spread with a smell of burnt flesh, was abandoned shortly before six o'clock on the Boulevard El Florido. El Florido is an infinite street east of Tijuana, where dozens of maquiladoras change shifts at the same time that the barrel was abandoned. That is why, before the police came around and announced something that was scarcely seen in Tijuana at the time, the workers had already approached and concluded that inside the container was a burned body. They could see something that looked like legs, knees, fingers.

At the outset, the state prosecutor called the unknown body *the barrelled one* and it was assumed that he was a man: whoever had murdered him, had cut off his testicles and put them inside his mouth.

The barrelled one´s name was Gerardo Martinez, but everyone called him *el Monstro* (sic). He was 24 years old and worked as a photographer for *El Sol de Tijuana.* Many things have been said about his murder: that it was drug related, that it was a fight over a woman, or because he owed money to the Sinaloa Cartel. Within the reporters underworld and in police circles the death of *el Monstro* was taken as a message for the Tijuana cartel: the people of Sinaloa were coming to the territory and burning people up was just one of the many ways to get a hold of it. Ángeles replaced *el Monstro* and thus became the first woman in Baja California journalism who was hired as a photographer for the crime beat.

*

Ten years ago, Ángeles was an attractive forty-year-old woman who, because of the gym, had everything to attract attention to her. Her hair was long, curly, voluminous and black, brilliantly black. Ever since that time high heeled shoes were already her weakness. I have seen her work in marshlands and in many crime scenes. But her high heels are another story. I was saying that Ángeles had everything to attract attention to her and from her first day at the newspaper, she learned to contain the rage

that every stalking or defiant look provoked inside her. At first look they offered invitations to go out to dinner or to financially sustain her and her children. With the second look, the arrogant one, Ángeles always thought that they were trying to tell her: "You're so fucking dumb".

Like that time when, shouting and complaining, an old guard reporter came in, proud to have received the national journalism award from Carlos Salinas de Gortari. "No fucking old hag is going to take away my sources," he snorted. His anger was provoked because Ángeles had attended a press conference at the state attorney's office that, according to the reporter, he had to cover.

*

In 2008, Ángeles photographed between ten and twelve deaths a day. That year they killed over 800 people in Tijuana. Ángeles came in at three in the afternoon and checked out towards dawn, when somebody else came in to relieve her. Soon, the waltz of the *quinceañera*, the bossa nova of the charity breakfasts, the mariachi at the parties of Jorge Hank Rhon were forgotten.

They were exchanged by the cries of a woman she heard her crying when she photographed her first dead. She exchanged them for a bag of dog treats that a man gunned down at the border cross was carrying in his passenger seat. Ángeles imagined the whole story: the guy had crossed over to the United States to pamper his pet and had ended up riddled with bullets.

Around her were a dozen cameramen and photographers, all men, who looked at her with contempt. Ángeles pretended to take a picture and placed her eye as close to the peephole of the camera as she could. Someone came up to her and, condescendingly, whispered, "You'll get used to it."

*

The sharp, insistent sound of the Nextel radio, which Ángeles placed under her pillow every night, woke her up shortly before five in the morning. A municipal police source called to order

her to get up, to take the camera and go to Cuauhtemoc Boulevard. Whatever Ángeles was about to photograph was not far from home. She grabbed her camera and, still in pajamas, ran out to a bridge, where she struggled with some police who would not let her go any further. There were no more photographers. Ángeles was alone under a bridge, waiting, when she suddenly felt something, a drop, or something like a stone, fall near her foot. It was blood. Instinctively, Ángeles turned up and saw that from the grates of the bridge hung a nylon rope that held a naked body with the genitals tied around the neck. That guy inaugurated the hanging man season in the history of drug trafficking. The deceased was a municipal official who had issued a driving license to Teodoro García Simentel, aka El Teo, a bloodthirsty killer from the Sinaloa cartel.

That October 9, 2009, Ángeles clicked and two things happened:

One: The photo traveled the world and the director with the Hitler mustache had to swallow the many times that bastard had told everyone that Ángeles "was an old darn woman" and was never going to bring in a good photo for the front page.

And two: the image exhibited a municipal government surpassed by the narco and that was never forgiven by Julian Leizaola, the municipal police chief at the time, the retired lieutenant who did not care about human rights, who declared war on Teo and his followers. From that day on, whenever Leyzaola saw her, he approached the yellow cord that divided the press from the corpses, and shouted to her: "Get away, you piece of trash!"

*

Ángeles was a lonely photographer until I got to the *El sol de Tijuana*. I was 20 years old the day I walked through the door of the worst-paying newspaper in all of Baja California. I wanted to work for the cultural section, but there were only vacancies on the crime beat. I accepted. In the mornings I would go to the university and at night I would sit next to Ángeles, waiting for

the radio to sound and run behind the ministerial policemen, only to return shortly after to the newsroom and write about the dead of the day.

Ángeles has always driven in a 1980 Nissan. It›s an old and stick car that often broke down on high-speed avenues. In jest and half seriously, I´ve told her to burn that piece of junk and to give me the honor of lighting the match. But because they would not even pay for a glass of water in her job, Ángeles has resigned herself to finding a way to make the Nissan work: She hits the engine with a stick to turn it on again.

The first time I got into the Nissan was also the first time I wrote a note (a narco-tunnel built by people from the Chapo Guzman where they enslaved a dozen men). But I remember my second note better: the murder of a young man who died embracing a machine gun. That night, amidst the sound of sirens, I heard a cry that made everything worse: it was the mother of that young man that ran from one end of the street, stumbling. I let out a few tears but quickly stopped myself. I assumed that no experienced reporter allowed himself to cry and I wanted to be at their level. Ángeles released her camera, looked at me and said: "Cry, Laurita, do not hold back, cry."

It was Ángeles who taught me to face the managers who treated me as a little girl and the bosses who asked for tendentious notes. She taught me how to double talk, and to get around the insidious comments of our colleagues, and to share what little we had: 20 and 20 pesos for gasoline; a roast taco for her, and another for me; a beer for the both of us.

*

No committee has rewarded her for being brave. None of her bosses have asked about the back pain that sometimes leaves her immobilized, useless; her spine was injured when she covered an event. No photographer's foundation has recognized her journalistic work. No one has given her the 20 or 50 pesos of gas that she puts in the Nissan every day. No municipal police officer has ever applauded her when she first arrived at the crime

scene. And maybe they never will. But Ángeles is there, inside the Oxxo store in front of the horrible pink building of the *Sol de Tijuana*. Every day she buys the same thing: a hotdog and a coke. When she doesn´t have the 18 pesos, she buys a bag of sunflower seeds to kill the hunger. Or to force the brain to forget about it because, she once told me, the excess salt makes her nauseous.

The last time we met, she told me that she is afraid that the bank will seize her house and that she will not even have money to buy food. Eight years ago, Ángeles stopped paying the mortgage. Her salary does not allow it: six thousand seven hundred pesos a month, but they deduct half to pay a credit made available to her by the newspaper with which she bought a camera. Because, above all, Ángeles is a photographer and she covers the crime beat.

JOURNALISM IN DISCRETE RESISTANCE.

Gerardo Romo Arias

ZACATECAS.- I did not believe it when Francisco Barradas offered me the job to be his personal assistant. He was the director of the newspaper *Imagen de Zacatecas* and had won the national journalism award for his unforgettable chronicle "Pase de charola" *-forced political contribution-* about Carlos Salinas de Gortari asking a group of entrepreneurs for 25 million dollars for the presidential campaign of Luis Donaldo Colosio in 1994 .

I immediately imagined myself being close to the powerful, eating with politicians, knowing their secrets and accessing privileged information. Instead, the next day I discovered my true work: I was a gopher at the news room. I had to be ready if a reporter needed anything. It was a job known in newspapers circles as a "bone." It was the year 2000.

I reviewed news bulletins, selected cable news, read, watched, learned. I was also assigned to the photo archive: it was before the digital age and I had to search among the negatives for the images that would illustrate the day's edition. My routine was interrupted when I ran into an agency note: President Ernesto Zedillo boasted the advances of his government on a tour in Durango.

I modified the note. I exchanged the *"he stated"* for *he fantasized* and *was delirious*. I thought my critical exercise would be well regarded and perhaps even worthy of a promotion. I was 17 years old and had less than a month in the newspaper. That night I went up to the director's office to tell him that I had finished. I liked seeing the portrait of a peasant with a weathered face, furrows on his skin and a hat behind his chair.

Two minutes later Barradas saw me again, this time he was shouting, calling me names and whatever foul words he could muster with his firm, hoarse voice.

"I do not know how I trusted people like you, get out, I do not want to see you again!" You're an idiot!

The modification to the president's note -which Barradas caught and corrected before it was sent to the press- occurred because I had read "The Democracy of statements in the Press" by Gideon Lichfield, correspondent for *The Economist* in Mexico. Lichfield criticized the number of synonyms used for *he said,* that journalists use in an uncritical way to reproduce official discourse. And he proposed introducing new synonyms like *he was delirious, fantasized,* or *lied.*

A couple of months after that, they contacted me again. I was invited back and I accepted.

I spent the next 22 months in the diary. At *Imagen* they trained me to know my home state, I covered the political and citizen sources. I walked the popular colonies on foot to find out about the people´s needs. My first salary was a check for 575 pesos that my father scanned and kept as a souvenir.

Soon I was promoted to cover governor Ricardo Monreal. I had to follow his steps in the capital and on his tours in the municipalities.

Since 2001, just three years into his six-year term, the Fresnillo native longed to be President. With his subjects from the PRD he formed a group denominated "Epicenter" and had stickers made with the legend "Monreal President" for 2006.

One morning, to celebrate the anniversary of the newspaper, Francisco Barradas told me: "Welcome to the Club. I have the first lawsuit against you. " All the newspaper reporters, he said,, were in the same situation, including him. We were uncomfortable for the PRD political class of that time, which could not be touched, not even with a critic´s petal.

Francisco Barradas was removed from his job on November 17, 2002 after five years at the head of the newspaper. His dismissal occurred after alleged acts of corruption from Monrealist officials works were published, and never sanctioned.

Also for the first time in the entity we documented how the deputies of the 57th local legislature, who officially earned 7,000 pesos a month were actually receiving up to 132,000. There were also chronicles that described the operation of the drug traffic in the municipality of Nochistlán without the authority doing anything stop them.

Required parentheses

I do not own a house, car or have social insurance. What I do have is Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) that I was recently diagnosed with. In recent days I went to Mexico City to study a diploma at the *Cátedra Granados Chapa* of the *Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana*. When I left the house, I took the *Eje Central* metro station. Before I could validate my card, a police woman came forward and gave me a free pass.

"Your disability is vey noticeable from afar, young man. You should apply for a special card. "My duty is to be attentive," she said.

In another time that gesture would have made me feel like an object of commiseration. But that day I smiled. It felt like it was proof of God's mercy in a world submerged in indifference. Due to difficulties at birth I have muscular contractures, flat feet, one leg shorter than the other and chronic anxiety. I spent years in rehab. With 37 years in my back I fumble my walk with out noticing.

A tough goodbye

Shortly after Francisco Barradas was fired from the newspaper *Imagen* I also resigned with other colleagues. We followed our friend and teacher to found a new journalistic project that came to light in July of 2003, the magazine Bi part of *Mexico Binacional*, financed by a group of 16 Zacatecan migrants with the idea of building a critical medium, that would link them with our homeland: one million 500 thousand Zacatecas that reside in the United States.

I took out a10 year visa for the US with the idea of traveling there constantly. I was assigned coverage of a trip to Atlanta with photographer Ernesto Moreno. We left Zacatecas by bus and when we arrived the border agents did not us me cross because I had no way to prove my economic solvency in Mexico to them. That was the end of the coverage.

A month and a half after the magazine came out Barradas was arrested by police officers. He was taken out of his car and escorted to the Cieneguillas prison, where he remained for five hours until his colleagues were able to put together the six thousand pesos for his bail. He was detained for libel because of a note he had published the year before when he was director of *Imagen*, and for which he had been acquitted. Our project could not withstand that hit and we closed in December 2003.

I insisted with Barradas that we should continue and that's how the both of us alongside a graphic designer founded the free weekly, VEA. We would meet at his house to select the subjects, report and deliver the issues. But the discouragement and pressure was such that Barradas ended up exiling himself in the United States. One night I accompanied him to the bus station before he made his way to Los Angeles. He left and something within me also broke, but his teaching and friendship remained. That dawn was the last time I saw him and it became clear to me that journalism was not a race of speed but of resistance.

The sunken ship

The newspaper *El Independiente* emerged in June 2003 with the promise of being the newspaper that the country needed -at least that´s what it´s slogan said- based on research, freedom and good treatment of its journalists. It would be conformed by a payroll of only 150 well-paid employees, with offices in the Avenida Revolución of Mexico city.

"Do you get on the boat or not?" asked Marielena Zamora, offering me the correspondence job in Zacatecas.

I was offered 300 pesos per note published. No benefits, no contract. Bonuses? no way. It was a deal sanctioned only by word and presented delicious challenge. In Zacatecas we were living the decline of Ricardo Monreal´s government. For their part, the migrants were fighting for the creation of a local migrant deputy and demanded not to be seen only as dollar sign.

I sent three or four notes a day. Out of them, only published two or three a week were published. The newspaper barely dedicated a page to the states and we were few correspondents. Seven months passed and I had not been paid a peso for my work.

On March 3, 2004, it all ended with René Bejarano's video scandals filling his pockets full of bills he had received from the hands of Carlos Ahumada, the owner of *El Independiente*. In Zacatecas the comrades mockingly asked me: "Did you get anything?". The last cover of the newspaper portrayed the members of the newsroom announcing their farewell. They were all there except for he correspondents. The newspaper closed and they owed me a little over 18 thousand pesos.They never paid a single note.

Then I learned that some of the reporters had sued Ahumada. I was left without knowing what to do and with my pockets empty. The boat I was invited to climb, sank.

Editor, director, publicist, photographer and distributor

My father got me 1,500 pesos for my round ticket to Mexico city and a meal. I arrived at the offices of *Contralínea* Magazine in the center of the city and spoke with Miguel Badilllo and José Reyes, director and deputy director, respectively. It took a couple of hours for us to agree to do a monthly edition of *Contralínea* in Zacatecas. It would have 12 pages of local information and the rest would be completed with the national edition. We defined the two reportages for the first issue: one on the abandonment of the Vetagrande municipality after intense mining activity and another on the pollution generated by a metal processor in Fresnillo.

We would do investigative journalism, we would be a news outlet for reporters by reporters, with total freedom and a guarantee that our working conditions would be fair. The income from the sale of magazines (a thousand copies a month at the 20 pesos cover price) would be all for me and we would divide 50-50 the advertising revenue. I would not have a fixed salary, benefits, or social security. I started with no resources. They absorbed the cost of production of the magazine that arrived at my private address because there was no money to rent an office.

I thought that distributing a thousand magazines would not be complicated. When the first pack of 20 boxes arrived with 50 magazines each I understood the dimension of the challenge before me. I made an agreement with a distributor and gave him one third of the magazines and distributed the other 630 in three days from my Dad´s truck with the help of my mother and sister. Those were tiring days.

I had no money to pay for reporters and that's why I did not hire anyone. For nine months that the adventure lasted I was director, editor, photographer, salesman and seller. I was not the debt collector, because the advertising money was sent directly to the offices of *Contralínea* in Mexico City.

Of the nine local issues that *Contralínea* had in the country at that time, Zacatecas was the one that generated the most resources because I obtained an advertisement deal with the state government, the Commission on Public Access to Information and the Autonomous University of Zacatecas (UAZ). That deal generated an income of 30 thousand pesos per month. We also won a state journalism award for a report on child laborers.

But I never got my 50 percent of the advertising revenue we had agreed upon and I decided to leave. The months of effort were never reflected in the agreed revenues.

I devoted to *Contralinea* more than 14 hours a day: I looked for sponsors, defined the subjects of investigation, took the photographs and passed whole days distributing the magazine at random homes or just hand in hand; I left on the windshields

of cars, in business and in libraries. I gave it away because I was interested in people reading the content.

From that experience I learned that journalism is a team effort and I regretted not having the vision to form one, because I had nothing to pay it with. In the end, they did not pay me either. The promise of creating a different environment with better working conditions was a utopia, if not a scam, at least in *Contralínea*.

At that time I also worked at Televisa Zacatecas for a year and my salary was delayed for nine months; when that money fell into my pocket it felt like a of kind involuntary savings. I accepted to show my plump body on the screen. I was excited to do chronicles and long-breath stories with freedom. When I went out to do a report on the demonstrations of thousands of teachers in the street, they smiled when they saw us with the camera and the microphone while saying in unison.... "you with the little logo, you also earn very little." And they were right.

Red gold

Since Ricardo Monreal's term, public safety and crime prevention plans have been marked by failure. The state moved from gangs to cartels being in control of public life through terror. More than 890,000 zacatecanos are seen by specialists as chronically hungry: that represents almost two-thirds of the population, in an entity that has the world's richest silver (Peñoles) and gold mines (Peñasquito Gold Corp).

Only one in ten crimes committed is reported. In Zacatecas we have the law of the jungle, where the owners of the money can do what they want with the communities. The mining magnates like Carlos Slim, Alberto Bailleres or Germán Larrea give away crumbs to the *comuneros*, they exploit their lands and the people are still immersed in poverty. The abuse became customary.

Mining in Zacatecas produces 11.7 million pesos per hour, according to calculations by researcher Ignacio Castro and

have produced a wealth of more than 600 billion dollars in the past five years alone.

The Center for Studies for Development of the UAZ also calculates that only 90 cents out of every thousand dollars remain in the territory. On top of that, areas like *Noria de Ángeles, Mazapil, Vetagrande* and *Fresnillo* suffer from severe environmental liabilities due to the enormous amount of heavy metals in their water and air. A lot of old people have died of cancer from this activity, and many more are still getting sick.

Reforma, deception and dismissal

On August 26, 2017 a call to my cell phone was the beginning of the end of little more than a decade as *Grupo Reforma´s* correspondent in Zacatecas. I left behind a salary of 545 pesos per day, which did not change from January 12, 2006 until October 27, 2016.

I was supposed to be on the premises for a work meeting the next day at 10 o'clock in the morning. The rushed appointment gave me a bad vibe. That morning, Aeromexico flight was delayed. I arrived at the *Reforma* office´s shortly after noon. I entered the installations after passing in front of the stone image of the Virgin of Guadalupe.

I saw some restless colleagues, mostly correspondents, as if we were seated in a funeral, there was Fernando Paniagua from Queretaro, Hector Raul Gonzalez from Cuernavaca, the fiery Reyna Haydée Ramirez from Sonora, and many others. At first I thought there was a recess at the promised board meeting. I had hardly said hello when Maxwell Gonzalez, the director of human resources, came out to meet me. When I saw him, my perspective changed. I knew exactly what would come after his greeting and what hid behind that smirk, forced smile.

It had been Maxwell himself who, in El Norte (a subsidiary of Reforma in Monterrey, which I reported to for 10 of my 11 years in the company), handed me my contract on the first day of work, a day that also coincided with my parent´s, Alicia and

Xavier, weeding anniversary. That 2006 I left cheerfully, with a computer and a Canon Power Shot gray camera. For three years they deducted 10 percent of my salary to pay for these indispensable tools of work.

For the last five years Maxwell had been in charge of firing at least 400 colleagues from the group, perhaps more. I had been spared from the three previous cuts, but endearing friends and companions from El Norte were dismissed.

Max spoke mindlessly, like a machine gun, about changes in the newspaper: that it had to be transformed, that technology, and social networks had made reporters expendable, that they had to rearrange things, that there was a crisis... Finally announcing that I was being dismissed by an "inevitable" cut in personnel.

But he immediately shifted.

-But don't worry, there´s a paramedic here who is to look after you and to prevent you collapsing.

Years ago, due to my overweight and nervous tension, I had tachycardia. I feared that it would assault me back in that moment. I do not know what gave me more courage, that comment from Max or the cowardice of the directors of the newspaper: neither Roberto Zamarripa, who leisurely assigned himself coverages abroad with all expenses paid, much less René Delgado or Lázaro Ríos, all of them directors. None of them came out to face their collaborators, some with more than 25 years in the newspaper, to explain the massive layoff.

"We're going to give you a letter of recommendation," Max said.

While the settlements were signed, there was an exhibition of fine shiny jewelry in the central courtyard of the building, and men with red bracelets at the height of their biceps were guarding the building. A kind of state trooper of 1971 but for the millennial age. One of them grabbed me buy the arm to escort me out and I said, "Let go of me you bastard, I am no criminal."

The Agreement of Termination of Employment stated that the legal limit of 48 hours a week was not exceeded, and

that "I never worked overtime". A Lie. If there´s a place where one works overtime it´s in journalism. A work day can exceed 14 hours. The agreement also ignored the fact that journalism is a high-risk activity: "During the time he worked for us, he did not suffer any work related stress, nor suffered any disability."

After the coverage of the elections in Baja California Sur in 2009, to which Grupo Reforma sent me, I was hospitalized for a severe colitis crisis. It happened again after the coverage of the elections for governor of San Luis Potosí in 2015, when I got sick of pancriatitis, when I had to stay in the hospital for ten days and was incapacitated for ten more. Not to mention payment for my disability or help with the postoperative transfer. It was my family that sheltered me.

Intimidated press

In its April 2017 report, Reporters Without Borders (RSF) called Mexico the third most dangerous country to practice journalism, only below Syria and Afghanistan. During the decade that I worked in the newspapers of the Reforma Group, among other news, I had to cover the escape of 53 inmates from the prison of Cieneguillas and a shooting in which seven state agents died in the municipality of Jerez, in the days of Amalia García (2004-2010) governor for the PRD party, which defined those violent episodes as "isolated events". There wasn´t a night that I did not hear about someone being killed.

In the following six years of Miguel Alonso Reyes (2010-2016), authorities finally acknowledged that there was a strong presence of organized crime in the 58 municipalities of Zacatecas. Recently the INEGI included the cities of Zacatecas and Fresnillo in their top 10 of citizen insecurity perception, above the eastern part of Mexico City.

In a report on Zacatecas published in 2012 by former US journalist Michael O'Connor for the Committee for the Protection of Journalists (CPJ), it was pointed out that crime has virtually control of the entire territory, "from deserts to mountain

ranges [...] the press is intimidated and the public is uninformed. In that entity, added O'Connor, journalists expressed a deep responsibility in their work and anguish because they can no longer carry it out properly. He assures CPJ that telling the truth was tantamount to suicide, and that self-censorship was the only way to survive.

A former editor of a newspaper in the capital recalled how, in 2014, a Texan man came to his office. He clutched the desk and gave him a warning. "From now on we are going to tell you what to publish and what not to." The courier arrived in the newsroom one afternoon claiming to be the spokes person for one of the cartels that were disputing Zacatecas. The director chose to quit his job and loose the 18 thousand pesos a month: "Now I work at the Autonomous University of Zacatecas, I earn a little bit less but I am calm."

His reporters earned six thousand pesos a month. And they had to hold other jobs to complete their expenses. Photographers were employed at weddings or 15-year-old parties and also photographed politicians to sell them images and balance their meager income. The newspaper depended entirely on the state government: "If the government stopped paying advertising (just over 150 thousand pesos a month), the newspaper would close" the director recalled. In his report, Mike O'Connor, underlined that self-censorship was prevalent in Zacatecas because of the absolute dependence of the news outlets to official advertising.

Journalism is an act of faith. Jesuit Alex Zatyrka once taught me that God is discreet and rarely manifests with magnificence as he did with St Paul when he was thrown from his horse to cure his blindness. God has to be looked for in everyday life. I trust that, as reporters, we will also learn to tell our stories and overcome the silence together, and be supportive in life rather than in death.

DON´T SHOOT, JOURNALISTS AT WORK

Pedro Canché

FELIPE CARRILLO PUERTO, Quintana Roo.- The aroma of raining flowers entices me to put melipona honey in my coffee. It's 10:23 in the morning of July 19th, 2017. I've gotten dozens of messages on WhatsApp. 97 missed calls.

I woke up late. I had to take care of our 45-day-old baby. It was my turn to watch how he manoeuvres the forces of his small jaws to eat, to cling to existence, it´-s a delight. We all do it every day. We all cling on to this exceptional moment in the universe.

I have Breakfast to cling to life. I watch the photos of blankets they sent me. Written on them, words in which they threaten to kill me and a Amir Ibrahim, a businessman who works in digital media in Quintana Roo. Just a day before I greeted him at a public event. That was the second time I ever saw that businessman. Those two blankets, that emulate an infamous narco tactic, revealed to me his other surname: Alfie, suggesting an Egyptian descent.

Trying to discredit us with blankets signed by supposed "zetas" is a strategy used by those who watch my every step. Criminalizing journalistic work is a very common practice in Mexico against uncomfortable, living or murdered journalists.

I sip my coffee while searching for details. The blankets were placed at opposite ends of Cancun. One of them on the fence of the hospital for the 510th region and the other on the CBTIS 11 school, on the Guayacán avenue. Busy places. For

Breakfast I´m having eggs with chaya, coffee and pitahaya water. Does it quench my appetite? Not at all. My instinct kicks in and two names come to mind. One has to know his enemies. I know who it is I've bothered.

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In October 2013, five thousand teachers blocked access to Cancun from my Mayan town of Felipe Carrillo Puerto. Governor Roberto Borge threatened the owner of the radio, Sebastián Uc Yam, for renting air time to me at the stations 100.1 *La Estrella Maya que habla* and 102.1 *FM Maya.*

Many of these teachers, who protested against the educational reform, were Mayans. We gave voiced their complaits in the local radio and in social networks. Banned in the newspapers of Quintana Roo, these radio spaces were vital for the teachers. In retaliation, Borge ordered a group of hooded men on October 26, 2013 to attack and burn the two radio stations that operated on the same land.

We did not remain silent and we spread the news on YouTube, Facebook and Twitter. We were pioneers of social networks in 2013.

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It was another day in prison in the tropical winter. One of those 272 days that governor Roberto Borge imprisoned me for: from August 30, 2014 to May 29, 2015, on charges of sabotage and covering an indigenous protest. Five individuals from Module 1 arrive at my cell. They show me their awls, nails, and sharpened spoons. They place them on my jugular. Death is nearer than their breaths. "El Shangai", "El Coquis" and "El Gato" have a mission to accomplish. I learned a long time ago not to be afraid of death. Death likes fear. It is the favorite smell of its victims.

"It's been a long time." When I got here, you guys beat me to exhaustion. I am here at your service" I tell them.

I cling to a pencil with a sharp point between the pages of the book The Other Secret War: The forbidden files of press

and power, by Jacinto Rodríguez Munguía, as my shield. I keep my eye on the sharp points of these prisoners and their two companions. One movement and at least one of them will become one-eyed.

About 20 comrades from Module 2 knew that these rogues would come to finish their mission. The national media demanded my release and governor Borge was loosing in federal court his ridiculous accusation of "sabotage" against me.

The companions, in solidarity with this injustice, came in to support me and Borge´s assassins retreated hastily. "Remember us, reporter, the poor rot here for lack of money. We do not have lawyers" was the request they made.

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A few days ago, on a Sunday in June 2017, a veteran journalist from Chetumal, Luis Cabañas Basulto, told me that Gabriel Mendicuti, Borge's secretary, timidly told his boss that imprisoning and beating me in jail was a bad idea.

"I don´t give a damn!" - was Borge's recurring response.

Under the orders of the corrupt Borge I was beaten on August 30th and 31st, as soon as I entered the prison. The rotating handle of my right shoulder was totally broken. My cervical spine will be marked by pain for the rest of my life. With hernias that rub the spinal cord the pain is constant. I left prison and finally, with the help of the Article 19 organization, I was able to consult medical specialists. They had to do two surgeries, which I refused. I opted for therapies. After 23 trips to Mexico City, paid by the Executive Commission of Attention to Victims (CEAV), I recovered 80 percent of the mobility of my arm. 60 day trips. I already dislike Mexico City. And I still have to go to cervical therapies there, but surgery is inevitable.

Roberto Borge accused me of covering a protest of Mayan Indians that took place on August 19, 2014 against the rise of rates of their drinking water. Ten days later I was being submitted to a trial before the corrupt judge Javier Ruiz Ortega. "[Your incarceration] is a direct order from Robert Borge. You need bet-

ter negotiators to gain back your freedom" said the judge while I was sitting in his office.

Borge ruined everything. From judges to government journalists who swarm after bad governments. From 2013 until now they are still campaigning against me. They hide behind anonymity. They open and close accounts on social networks to insult me. They are the flesh and blood *bots* of the system. They are never touched because they are an extension of a system that imprisons and kills journalists.

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The governor of Quintana Roo Roberto Borge Angulo (2011-2016) set out to dismember the critical press to defend the emporium that he built by abusing the power of his office and the money from the people of Quintana Roo.

Roberto's uncle, Miguel Borge Martín, became governor of Quintana Roo (1987-1993) with the patronage of Raul Salinas de Gortari. Miguel Borge fought Enrique Molina, from the Group Yucateco Escorpión -part of the Pepsi Cola franchise- for the transport of passengers on the maritime route from Playa del Carmen-Cozumel. He Lost. The project was to remain a dream for the Borges family.

Mario Villanueva Madrid, another unsatiable governor (1993-1999), ceded the sanctuary of the Xcacel tortoises to a group of Spanish businessmen. With his business built with public power, his fortune grew to the extent of enabling him to invest $19 million dollars in the now defunct Lehman Brothers bank. "From 1993 to 2001 I participated in a conspiracy to organize financial transactions, knowing that it was the product of an illegal activity, to conceal the character and origin of that product," stated Mario Villanueva when he pleaded guilty of money laundering before Víctor Marrer, a New York judge.

But the plunder didn´t stop there. Joaquín Hendricks Díaz (1999-2005) arrived and enriched his 12 brothers, his wife and children. From his position as governor of Quintana Roo he used front men like Isaac Hamui, a Lebanese, and gave him

49 percent of the Convention Center of Cancun, a building that belonged entirely to the state government. He raised the public debt from 300 million to 1300 million pesos.

Joaquín Hendricks tolerated the kidnapping of the journalist Lydia Cacho, captured and tortured by the police of Mario Marín the "*gober precioso*" from the state of Puebla, to fulfill the demands of his friend "the king of blue jeans", the Lebanese Kamel Nacif Borge, cousin of Robert Borge Angulo.

And then came Felix Gonzalez Canto (2005-2011), who 10 months before leaving the governorship incurred in financial debt with five banks for a total of seven billion pesos without making any impact on public works. He asked for another 2.7 billion pesos of which he used 700 million to restructure the previous debt. Those 10,728 million pesos of public debt have made him the richest and most influential politician in Quintana Roo to date.

And from that position of power he chose a malleable successor: a boy who worked with his father in the motorcycle rental business in Cozumel. He asked him to work as his private secretary. His plump figure made him a laughing stock even for his bodyguards. They called him *botarga* -the costume-. One time the young man was walking around with a shirt that revealed his navel while he was carrying the governor´s portfolio. Gonzalez Canto reproached his image: "I pay you well so that you can buy good clothes but you look like a costumed character".

In December 1994, young Borge was studying at Tec in Monterrey when his father Roberto Borge Martín was imprisoned for a tax fraud of three and a half million pesos. These were difficult years for the student. He was a victim of school bullying. Félix González Canto chose him as his successor to take care of his back. It was his armor of impunity.

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Roberto Borge had a salary of 105 thousand 336. But only six months after taking office as governor, in early 2012, he liquidated the 12 million pesos that his father owed to banks.

What most of the few journalists in Quintana Roo criticized was the huge public debt that Gonzalez Canto incurred and that Borge increased by 550 percent. Gonzalez Canto left it at 10,728 billion pesos and Roberto Borge increased it to 22,541 million pesos in 2016. 10 percent of that debt was wasted promoting his public image; in a state where the Mayan people live in misery it is a criminal expense.

Borge was not the only one to be enriched. More than 50 officials from his gang and hundreds more also did. The Public Registry of Property was altered to put their names on land and houses. The properties and beach houses were the most affected. Folios disappeared and were replaced with fake royal seals. Today hundreds of homes have changed owners without their legitimate proprietors knowing.

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On February 17, 2015 (when I was in my fifth month in jail), the company *Barcos Caribe* started the sea crossing service between Cozumel and Playa del Carmen. Their godfather was Guillermo Ruiz de Teresa, general coordinator of Ports and Merchant Marine of the Secretariat of Communications and Transportation (SCT).

-This man has fulfilled his family dream and he now owns the ships and the route his uncle could not get in 1991. He is building an economic emporium. He has a federal endorsement, who can stop him?, I wrote in my journal while in jail the that February 18th.

"You have angered a man with a lot of power and money," said my lawyer Aracely Andrade Tolama hired by the organization Article 19 for my legal defense.

I was just beginning to understand Borge's wrath against me for calling him corrupt. He had burned the radio station where I rented air time to spread the news. Now he sought a pretext to imprison me. He sent people to beat the Mayans who were protesting against the water rate hikes. I covered that event and it became national news. I was angry. He accused me of sabotage and I was facing up to 20 years in prison.

The looting of the state was a family affair. While he was carrying out his defamatory campaign and persecuting reporters, Roberto Borge's mother, Rosa María Angulo Castilla, was serving herself with a large spoon and appropriating 111,763 square meters of beaches from the territorial reserve on the island of Cozumel, which she bought at one percent of its real value and then transferred to Siyenat del Caribe SA de CV.

There were in total four properties that she "bought" from the Institute of Real Estate Heritage (IPAE) at a bargain price of 28 million 547 thousand 182 pesos that later she also ceded to the company Siyenat.

With this triangulation, Borge's mother suddenly had over 200 million pesos to justify investments in the shipping company *Barcos Caribe,* which operated three ships on the Playa del Carmen-Cozumel route. Three ships that were bought in Tanzania for 11 million dollars. For this investment, Roberto Borge used front men like his father´s secretary, Maria Lourdes Pinelo Nieto and his family lawyer, César Celso González Hermosillo. The three are now fugitives from justice. His company *Impulsora Marítima de Quintana Roo y del Caribe SA de CV*, owner of the Caribe Boats is now secured by the Tax Administration System (SAT).

After the investigations carried out by the journalist Fabiola Cortez and the magazine *Luces del Siglo*, and the law suits filed by the current governor Carlos Joaquin, Borge left two ferry boats parked in Australia that cost 15 million dollars each and two in Progreso, Yucatán that cost 16 million pesos. The Isla Mujeres-Cancun and Cancun-Cozumel routes had failed. The "king" of maritime transport had fallen. His fierce struggle against the critical press was to no avail.

While Borge kept me in prison he sold 9,500 hectares owned by the state to private individuals to get his cut and used frontmen to diversify the investments that he had been doing since he took office in 2011. He ripped of Bacalar, Felipe Carrillo Puerto, Tulum , Cozumel, Cancun, Playa del Carmen and Isla Mujeres of their public patrimony, of an area six times as big as the hotel zone in Cancun.

The administration of Carlos Joaquin found out that 16 billion pesos were stolen by the Borge administration. We are barely seeing the tip of the skein. He spent billions of dollars in air transport for him and his friends. This unjustifiable waste of money put, Carlos Acosta Gutiérrez, former director of the VIP-Saesa, in prison. And there are two more people detained, Mauricio Rodríguez and Paulina García. In total there are 17 fugitives from the Borge gang.

When Borge toured in Paris, supposedly to promote tourism, he called up a Play Boy playmate from Miami who was very popular in those days. He rented a private jet for her transfer. That´s how he spent a honeymoon in Europe at the expense of the treasury.

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When I was imprisoned by Roberto Borge, the Protection Mechanism for Human Rights Defenders and Journalists of the Ministry of the Interior refused to include me as a victim. Víctor Manuel Serrato, the coordinator at that time, argued that the law did not allow protection for imprisoned journalists.

A laws suit brought forth by Article 19 forced the Mechanism to take some precautionary measures in my case, but they were only applied when I regained my freedom after nine months in jail. I was finally freed when the federal justice took on my case and dismissed Borge's false accusations.

That is another struggle that the guild, along with organizations like Article 19, strive to accomplish: to force institutions to act and to make them work. I have done this ever since I joined the mechanism. My "emergency button" hasn´t always worked. It´s a telephone number given to journalists and human rights defenders who work in high risk situations. And my law suit for Crimes Against Freedom of Expression (FEADLE) and my imprisonment sits in the prosecutor's office gathering dust.

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In June of 2017 Roberto Borge reproached me: "you are the cause of all my evils". Borge Angulo (2011-2016), once a powerful governor, was now behind a fence and guard, imprisoned and charged with multiple crimes. He was one of the 254 inmates at *El Renacer* prison in Gamboa, Panama. It was true, we had been, several journalists and I, the plague that denounced his corruption. I'm sure if I had them face to face he'd tell the same thing. "You are the cause of all my evils."

Borge knew that his days in prison and the fall of his empire were provoked by the denunciations of a group of journalists and the media that decided to confront his tyranny. I was detained 272 days. Borge sought to teach all journalists a lesson so that we would quietly let him amass a fortune like all his predecessors.

In his government, Borge created a wide network of bots and trolls with the help of his social network operator, César Mortera. They propagated infamy and slander against journalists, activists, politicians from other groups and even against citizens who dared to comment on the internet.

In 2014 and 2015, the years he put me in jail, he spent 2,221 million pesos in official advertising. He distributed huge amounts of money to local media and prostituted journalism in Quintana Roo and even in other latitudes. The great majority of the communicators became official spokes persons and obeyed his defamatory campaigns. They became Borge´s whores.

The organization Article 19 documented 76 attacks against journalists in the five-year Borge administration. And it was in 2013 when the offensives against journalists increased brutally. The portal *Noticaribe* and the magazine *Luces del Siglo* were attacked mercilessly by both trolls and hackers. *Luces del Siglo* was cloned in all its editions by the government. Here are some examples of the attacks on the press:

In January 2014, I visited Javier Vite, a reporter for *Luces del Siglo*, at the IMSS hospital in the 510 region of Cancun. He had been chased and run over by a compact car. The police never found the people guilty of that aggression. It was evident

that his journalistic work was uncomfortable for the PRI government.

"As soon as Borge arrived, the government outlawed Hugo Martoccia, the correspondent for *La Jornada* and now director of the *La Opinión* web page. The web page *Expediente Quintana Roo* owned by Esmaragdo Camaz's was also attacked on several occasions and shut off from the internet" recalls Luciano Núñez, director of the news site *La Palabra del Caribe* and at editor of *Luces del Siglo* at the time.

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And we are far from a final chapter. The political enemies who are inconvenienced by my work use the *narcomantas* -message sheets- to intimidate. They found out that even jail was not enough to silence me. What's more, I opened the news portal **pedrocanchenoticias.com** and since October 8, 2015 I have not had a day off.

Among enemies that my journalistic work has brought forth, I have four former governors of Quintana Roo. Just a day before the the *narcomantas* appeared, Mario Villanueva Madrid (1993-1999), threatened and insulted me in a letter he put up on Facebook. I criticized him because he extorted the state government: he wants the state executive to pressure federal authorities to bring him to Chetumal to finish his prison term. A close friend of Mario Villanueva told me that he has at his disposal hired assassins and that they would do him "any favor".

"When Villanueva was in Almoloya, I met people willing to kill and they have placed themselves under my orders," he told me after his failed attempt to convince me to stop doing critical journalism against Roberto Borge and Gonzalez Canto.

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Roberto Borge, imprisoned in Panama, has hired the services of John Jairo, the inmate who heads the self-government of *El Renacer* jail. Using Jairo´s phones, +50761037226, Borge has ordered a black campaign against me calling on his loyal journal-

ists, those who sold their pen in exchange for a lot of money, who I called Borge´s whores in a report.

They have launched slander and insults against me and my family. Since 2013 there is a dirty war and black campaign against me. I have been accused of human trafficking and of rape of minors, lies they repeat on their Facebook accounts.

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At the moment I write these lines a message came from the apocryphal Facebook profile of Jorge Uitzil: "I already located where you live. I'm hunting you to kill you." The threats have multiplied.

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A young wavy-haired man from RCU company arrived at Felipe Carrillo Puerto to exchange my satellite emergency buttons. They had not been working for over a week. I had done some tests, which I recorded on video and sent via WhatsApp to Patricia Colchero Aragonés, the National Executive Coordinator of the Mechanism for the protection of journalists. When I needed the most, the button did not work SOS. The young man was there with new buttons.

***

They know that I laugh in the face of the death and I touch it´s face. My Mayan grandparents taught me that living in fear is not living. And that the fear of dying is not a province of kings, princes and warriors, nor of talented. Every day lived in fear is a dead day. And the dead do not enjoy life.

If they kill me, remember that fear is not an option. You are seeds. They are the ones who are afraid. They are afraid of ideas, of pens. We are not kamikazes. We take precautions. We do not have large sums of cash in bank account and that is why we rely on the Mechanism and other organizations.

We must continue to push the institutions of the Mexican State, like the National Human Rights Commission, the CEAV,

the Mechanism, and especially the FEADLE, to investigate and impose exemplary sanctions. The Mexican State lacks the will to apply the law. And both his lack of will and the prevailing bureaucracy are lethal to the journalist.

The CNDH did a good job worth recognizing. It culminated with their recommendation 13/2015 where Borge was ordered to apologize for imprisoning me and pay a compensation. Borge refused everything. Then before the Ministry of the Interior intervened, he reluctantly sent his officials to give a "public apology" with a small detail... without his presence. Even with a UN issued recommendation the Mexican State compliance was partial.

In June the great cedar tree that shades our house threw a rain of flowers. The staircase was filled with a carpet of small yellow-green drops smelling of honey. The fragrance attracted the rarest insects of the Maya Zone of Quintana Roo. We are in the navel of the state.

While I enjoy the rain of flowers I consider putting up blankets in the same places in Cancun where they threatened us, but with this legend:

"Do not shoot. Journalists at work. "

MY LIFE IS NOT WORTH A KILLER' S LIFE

Modesto Peralta Slim

"No one promised us a rose garden;
we're talking about the danger of being alive."
Fito Páez

La Paz, Baja California Sur. It was a Good Friday when Max Rodriguez was killed. On April 14th 2017, it was a warm and sunny day, perfect for vacationers but boringly static for those of us who stayed at home. Maximino Rodríguez Palacios, a reporter with the crime beat, became the first journalist to be killed at close range by hitmen in Baja California Sur. Sitting in front of my computer, my stomach and emotions were turned upside down. I went to see my housemate: as soon as I told him "Max was killed", I lit a cigarette and started crying uncontrollably.

The details were published in the media, like ***Colectivo Pericú*,** where Max sent his notes:"It is reported that the perpetrators of the attack opened fire on the reporter from a white pick up truck; we don´t any more details about them at the moment. Maximino Rodríguez Palacios arrived at the parking lot aboard his vehicle, a blue Honda sedan, when he was shot and allegedly fired upon with high-powered rifles. His wife was unharmed (...) According to early reports, the reporter had just parked in the disabled area, where he would request a wheelchair for his wife who has mobility problems when gunmen suddenly opened fire. His lifeless body was left inside the car.

Weeks later I had a soda at San José del Cabo with Cuauhtémoc Morgan, director of *Colectivo Pericú*, and he put on speaker the moment when the crime beat reporters got to the site,

and corroborated that it was indeed their companion who was dead. Hearing it was macabre. Morgan admired Max's work; he described him as a very professional and discreet reporter that never revealed his sources. Max had a kind of movie life: close to retiring, he was already in his twilight years -which by the way, he didn't show at all - and decided to work one last time for the crime beat in La Paz.

Those days, I was on edge. It was a day without real danger but marked by my growing paranoia.That same afternoon I had even spoken to another reporter friend: I told him that **my interview with Max Rodríguez** was being shared or quoted in national and international news outlets; that it spoke well about my work and my paper, but that I was afraid: an inexplicable fear. He told me not to worry, that "it wasn't a risk note," and that nothing was going to happen to me.

I interviewed Max Rodriguez in my digital magazine **CULCO BCS** and it was published on December 6,2016. That day it seemed like it wasn't going to be shared -Max smiled when I said this- but it soon went viral; then it was seen again after his murder. It was used by BBC and cited by organizations like Article 19, as I had been the only or last one to interview him and to ask him directly if he had been threatened.

Last June I won the statewide journalism award for this work. On the night of the award, I chatted with Luis Roldán, also part of "the police beat" and who took our photos for that interview, and knew that Max had been pleasantly surprised by my interview. He thought I was just going to go over cold numbers, and that he wasn't going to get emotional by remembering a dead partner or openly speaking about his fear; but I´ve always been interested in the emotional impact, and those questions, like arrows hidden in the quiver, were thrown at him at the last minute.

I cared about his feelings, fears and worries, in short, about the man being behind the person who reported the executions. To know that Max expressed himself in this way moved me greatly. I told Luis that I was going to erase the last words

of that interview for space reasons: people don't always arrive at the end of a long story, and perhaps it would have been irrelevant, but now anyone who reads those last lines will find a brutal and different meaning. Max Rodriguez spoke of a "very strong recognition to the wives of those of us who work in the police beat, because they are always on high alert. "

I made an appointment to interview him at a high school where I worked. It was the end of November 2016. He arrived accompanied by two other reporters. He reflected serenity and was able to laugh because he was used to portraying blood and approaching human remains; to scrape, in any way possible, the testimonies of the panic-filled neighbors; to submerge himself in nights of turrets and striken shell casings on silent avenues that signal the end of the world. From there I also realized that he was a daredevil: I asked him for a "very general" photo for the cover of the note, and he sent me one with a hitman going out of the hospital on a wheelchair, which he shot from the front and shows the hitman´s pissed off face: he even threatened him. "No, I told him, this is the interview of someone who works the crime beat, it's not a crime note per se, I'm not going to get us in trouble for that picture. But he loved it; he insisted. I erased it from my cell phone; finally, we used another one.

In La Paz, there are a handful of reporters who go straight to the violent events: about five colleagues, even if several media outlets steal their notes and publish them as their own, a practice deeply rooted in local journalism. The fact is that this man seemed to me to have the most mature profile to talk about the subject without boasting or feigning to be a protagonist. That's how it was. I was surprised by his poise, his modesty. He believed that "journalists should not be part of the note, but simply write it". We greeted each other a couple of times over the ensuing weeks and he later called me to correct a few words in a publication of mine - and he was right, I later changed the word "vintage" for "sale", which is not the same thing, and that correction will never be forgotten.

I've never covered the crime beat, and I don't think I ever will, but I've published it and sometimes worked on it. When I was editor of a digital news program, I made a detailed list of all shootings and executions that would serve as future reference, but it was lost when I switched to another newsroom, and to date, due to the hermeticism of the authorities, no one knows the precise number of total deaths provoked by the war between criminal factions that began on July 31,2014 with a triple execution close to the Los Planes village. This text is completed exactly three years after that event, and it is estimated that at the end of this year the deaths attributable to organized crime could easily reach 800 (1), in an entity of about 800,000 inhabitants (2), that would mean that one in every thousand South Californians has been murdered. And in their path, children, women and innocent people who had nothing to do with that war, other than being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

In La Paz, you don't have to be a reporter to run into executions, persecutions or shootings. Once -I think in 2014- I wrote a chronicle because I was woken up by a shooting that occurred at an Oxxo store just around the corner; the smell of gunpowder got to my window, almost at midnight; I remember putting on my badge and going out with my shirt on backwards, and waiting for other reporters and policemen until I finally felt relieved enough to take pictures and capture details.

I titled the text "Before the Virgin's Eyes". When they were persecuted by the military, some criminals threw a grenade at the boardwalk and came to hide just a few meters away from where I live, almost in front of the Shrine of Guadalupe, where an altarpiece with her image observed the deployment of police and soldiers who evicted the neighbors. Another time, one afternoon when I was leaving the office where I worked as an editor, I got off the bus to take pictures and get information on a triple execution a few blocks away from my house, near the Teatro de la Ciudad.

When I became an editor in 2014, I corrected and published information from the State Attorney General's Office

(PGJE), which at the beginning of this wave of violence was able to send out newsletters quickly and with complete data. That strategy has been completely abandoned, and now the PGJE throws out tongue twisters that nobody understands and which don´t have any information. A friend of mine described a recent official statement as follows:"It looks like Kafka´s process told by *Cantinflas*.

At the end of last year there was another shooting and detention just below the apartments where I live, in the Santuario Quarter. These less aggressive events have caused the people of La Paz to "Thank God because they only left bullets on the walls." However, they´ve left me with a paranoia that to this day persists. I live in front of a noisy boulevard, where ambulances and patrols leave no room for calm or darkness. In' The Boulevard of Broken Dreams', as I call the 5 de Febrero street, addicts are often seen shouting, crazed by the *chuky* - the drug also known as' crystal'-, and vagrants sleep in rags at night, but the most constant thing is the patrol cars. During the pilgrimage to the Virgin of Guadalupe, this section of the city looks like a disco.

These are just a few moments of the hundreds and hundreds that are replicated throughout Baja California Sur. We reached a point where we no longer retain in our minds the details of violent events. The war between hitmen that we have witnessed in the lower half of the peninsula has become routine, one where corpses are piled up in the memory like old car pieces in a yard: they are just bulks, things, numbers.

I wouldn't cover the crime beat because I don't want to be killed; I don't want my name to be called at a contest, a generation, whatever. Not only did they teach me the slogan that it is not worth risking my life for a note, but in the concrete case of this war between drug gangs, my life is not worth that of a murderer. I have been able to observe and hear things, stories, and I have had to resort to other ways to decant the need to tell them -because it becomes a necessity! I have expressed myself from angles other than the news: I touch the subject from less

controversial trenches, and I trust that the intelligent reader will grasp this.

Once a literary review allowed me to express my restlessness, and in spite of everything, my hope in the future. Today I work on a literary project. I would be disgusted for it to be labeled 'narcoliterature', but it is a suffocating reality, that is why I decided to turn to literature to deal with this subject. Is this reprehensible? Should I be ashamed? It doesn't matter anymore; to do anything I need to be alive in the first place. I was sometimes embarrassed to say that I was a journalist who did not cover the crime beat, as if my desk work, intellectual or from any other perspective was less important.

Violence and almost daily killings linked to the 'guarantee' of impunity are no small matter. I don't deny that I've joined the indifferent citizenry. I came to a personal conclusion: I have to value my life and live intensely because I could be next. If it is so easy to kill us, then we must vindicate the meaning of our existence and value life. One way to get back at this crisis is by doing things that make us happy.

It was Easter week when good old Max got killed. Many were on vacation and the news of his murder came to them late, perhaps they were indifferent after so many notes about being people executed, or perhaps they were tired after going to the beach. The criminals escaped and conspiracy theories were not lacking as possible causes of his death. If he was killed it must have been because "of something". They say that dead people die three times: the second time by criminalizing them and the third time by forgetting them. A couple of months later, the authorities announced the apprehension of the reporter's four alleged murderers, the causes of which have not yet been revealed; but among their statements, a dark issue would be uncovered: the existence of narco graves in Cabo Pulmo, where one of the country's most important ecotourism developments is being developed.

Max's murder was a watershed in journalism in Baja California Sur. His death left open wounds: uncertainties, fear,

helplessness. For a time there were no "executions" in the media, only accidents: some comrades simply did not report these deaths. I learned that police reporters met to discuss issues of their own security: how to deal with this information, to omit names, and so on; on one occasion I heard one of them say that he was afraid because he had already been threatened: he asked other journalists if they thought he should continue or to simply not publish the news.

Later we learned about the murder of Javier Valdez, in Culiacán, who had come to La Paz to present his books; here he was very loved and admired, and I was shocked when I attended the presentation of his book "Orphans of the narco". Earlier, last March, we learned about the crime against Miroslava Breach in Chihuahua, who studied here at the Autonomous University of Baja California Sur (UABCS), and there was not a single official pronouncement in this state after her assassination, only one teacher talked with her communications group, and she has been one of the few to address the dangers of exercising journalism, an issue that we delusional *choyeros* believed to be far away!

Practicing journalism not only means that you could be exploited for miserable wages, as some of my experiences have been, but it can also mean suicide. And it is not only about fearing criminal groups, but even more so, politicians in power. A collegue said it in a forum organized at UABCS that he was more afraid of senior officials than of narcos. Among criminals with long weapons and repressors from the state machinery, journalism here is done only for passion or convenience, or to say it differently: it is either done or simulated.

I share a testimony told specifically to me for this text: a person working in a media news outlet in La Paz was harassed during the second semester of 2016 because of publications in his personal Facebook account, which heavily criticized the State Government. With years of working in this environment, in his social network - on a personal basis, not as a company or any institution - he shared some videos of social movements, from a demonstration in La Paz by people opposed to shutting down

the Student House in Mexico City, to the arrival of police officers to dismantle a demonstration of fishermen who were protesting against the construction of a tourist development in Punta Lobos.

Some of these videos had hundreds of thousands of views. The director of his media outlet asked him to withdraw these publications on the grounds that they depended on a broadcasting agreement with the state government and they could withdraw their sponsorship.

The reporter declined, and defended his freedom of speech arguing that they were not edited videos but taken live in public situations. He was told not to publish critical information in his network, and when he delivered a note that talked about how the communicators work was being hindered in the public Health sector, they did not publish it -although they told him that they would pay for it anyway. Then and only then did he realize that the censorship was serious.

About four months ago, this colleague received some emails from his boss asking him to erase some of his publications and 'lower' his sarcastic tone. In response to his refusal, he had a final meeting with his director, who argued that the government would stop granting them resources, and that allegedly - without naming names - senior officials "were upset" with the journalist; he was told that he should think of the families who depended on this news outlet; that he could no longer find a way to stop him from publishing on his Facebook page; and even knew that a letter of resignation had been prepared for him.

This harassment caused him enormous stress to the point of telling his boss that he was being bullied. Our colleague still send his news there. So far in 2017, his director "takes time" to edit his texts, softening expressions or omitting names. The reporter has the impression that they are augmenting his work load - having him cover events in one place and scheduling another on the opposite side of town only an hour later- and waiting for him to make a mistake to fire him.

In recent months he thought about resigning, but wondered what he would do next: he doesn't want to earn less or

suffer in the hands of his bosses. In the conversation we had, he said he would rather be killed than continue to live in fear.

While we were chatting, as the night fell on the Malecón in La Paz, an ambulance passed by and few people were surprised: we´ve gotten used to being lulled by the sirens. Once upon a time this was a peaceful boardwalk; who knew they would throw grenades here or execute someone in a restaurant or at the end of a political rally. Who would have thought that a citizen would run the risk of being caught between bullets or among the rulers' hatred for the mere fact of informing. Far from the center of Mexico, those who read us can imagine our half peninsula illuminated with the flashing lights of a turret: with the blue sea that surrounds and isolates us and with the red that has stained our streets.

La Paz, BCS. Julio de 2017.

TERRITORIES

Letter from the exile

Patricia Mayorga

Chihuahua, Chih. One cold November morning in 2015, Marisa, an indigenous woman, told me the reasons why she and her children fled from Urique. Grinding her teeth, she said that they had done it because of economic problems, when suddenly we all heard a very loud sound.

"A tire blew" she assured me. Similar sounds followed, then more frequent and more intense detonations. "They're bullets. If you want to follow me" she shouted as she ran to the hill behind the supermarket where we had gathered.

I remember that as we fled to safety, the detonations kept getting more intense, closer, as if they were machine-guns or grenades. In addition to us, children, women and young people were running to escape the shooting, which we would later know was between two gangs of the Sinaloa and La Línea cartels that are fighting over the territory for drug trafficking. And later I would also come to know that, as they were running, the inhabitants remembered the massacre of 13 people, including a baby, which took place in the summer of 2008 in Creel. The first massacre of the sierra and the country, since Felipe Calderón militarized the country.

At the top of the hill where we ran, we entered a house to protect ourselves. And it wasn´t until that moment, in that place, that Marisa told me the real reason why she had moved from her home, like many others in the Tarahumara region: violence.

A year ago my husband was killed, he was on an errand, he was going to Guachochi and it he got killed(...) how many innocent people are going to die now? The man was killed in a crossfire between two gangs of the Sinaloa and La Línea cartel in

one of the clashes they had in Samachique, municipality of Guachochi. Months later, another son of hers was killed, a random victim of another confrontation.

On the table covered with a green rubber tablecloth, Marisa offered me water to dampen the shock. The youngest of her daughters watched us from the double bed in front of the table. The whole family took refuge in that single large room with a bathroom when they arrived from the municipality of Urique.

Adrenaline was what allowed us to continue talking. At this moment, it was no longer about doing an interview, but about venting all the accumulated fear and horror, not only from the shooting that we had just witnessed, but also from Marisa´s year away form her home and my five years, without pause, reporting the violence in the mountains: displaced people, murdered, disappeared.

A half-hour after the attack, Marisa's 18 year old daughter, arrived. Still distressed, she told us that she was inside one of the businesses located on the road that crosses Creel and from there she was able to see several men arriving in a white Tahoe van.

"They were pointing like this (towards the establishments), they didn't start shooting until they confronted each other. We threw ourselves on the ground and remained there until the shooting calmed down. They brought me to the house" she said breaking into tears while leaning on the head of the bed. Her younger sister stroked her head and comforted her: "My brother is not dead, he is happy. Don't be afraid." "Cry till you get it all out, cry," her mother told her.

Later we learned that an indigenous worker had been killed, that a doctor and two women traveling in a truck were shot and wounded, and that a tourist van was shot through.

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Suddenly, we found ourselves covering a war without being war correspondents. We didn't understand that this was a war until years later. A journalist who is sent to cover an armed con-

flict in another country or region knows what is getting into, that there will be two fronts. But in the case of those of us, who are reporters in this country and in states like Chihuahua, it's different. There are not two fronts, but several, and it is not possible to distinguish between good and evil, between the authorities and the criminals. The victims are our people.

I would like to refer in particular to the impact of violence on the indigenous communities of the Sierra Tarahumara and our work as journalists in that region.

Over the last few years, these communities have seen their forests destroyed by commercial, energy related or tourism megaprojects, but above all, by the complicity of drug trafficking and the government that is driving them off their land to plant crops, transfer drugs or to set up camps for people getting kidnapped. And thus the lands of these people who hold peace, resistance and the environment as their core values, were transformed.

Five years ago we created ***Red libre Periodismo*** -Free Journalism Network- because several comrades wanted to denounce what was happening in the sierra and we didn't have the space to do it. Not even to share our helplessness, our fear, our anger at what we were going through. We were anxious to denounce these crimes, threats and forced displacements beyond the barriers of our own means.

Stories such as the one that a fellow reporter wanted to tell: the widow of a commander killed in Guadalupe and Calvo, who was not even given support to pay for the funeral. I remember that the reporter asked us to cover it, but criminal threats in the region prevented us from doing so, we did not have the resources to protect the journalist nor the victim.

That is when the idea of organizing ourselves into a horizontal network arose, to train us in security, in covering the victims and, above all, to have a space for analysis and meetings, because emotional self-care is essential to face the fear, frustration and sadness of this job. Over time, we have worked with reporters from other states and are now pushing for official advertising regulation.

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Governor César Duarte Jáquez (2010-2016) tried to silence critical journalism. Writing about the impact of drug violence was a complicated task due to the lack of access to official information and the impunity that reigned throughout the entity. Duarte gave millions of pesos to newspaper companies in exchange for their silence. Most of the media not only avoided publishing anything to help us steer through the violence, but they also managed to establish lawsuits against the news outlets that did.

Although Javier Corral Jurado's government has cancelled its monetary relationship with the press, it has generated a message of animosity against the journalists' guild. His government describes the media and journalists as "paid voices" when critical information about his work is published. This has increased the vulnerability that the guild already carries.

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Miroslava Breach Valcudea, correspondent for *La Jornada* in Chihuahua, was murdered on 23 March 2017. Her prestige, her courage and the paper that she worked for were not enough to save her. Miroslava had accompanied the resistance of the indigenous communities of the Sierra Tarahumara for decades, who sought to survive the plunder, poverty and violence ushered upon them.

In September 2015, hundreds of families in Chínipas had to leave their towns because of the threats of organized crime. She was from Chínipas, a mountain municipality that borders the state of Sonora. She denounced the displacement and pointed to those allegedly responsible. Her work was incisive and sharp, she knew how to place political responsibility in the midst of all that barbarity. After the incursion of a new group that caused massive displacements, disappearances of people occurred. Miroslava accompanied the victims cautiously, with fear and in silence, to prove that they were being ignored by the authori-

ties when they denounced these crimes. Miroslava Breach gave strength to Estela Ángeles Mondragón, a lawyer and human rights activist when her life partner, Ernesto Rábago, was murdered on March 1,2010, because he defended the Baquiachi community from the abuses of chieftans who have taken their land from them. Miroslava let him know that she would be there to denounce any aggression against him.

Miroslava was selective in her affections and in her relationship with her colleagues. Her friend and colleague Alejandro Salmón, defined her as "the most humble diva". The fact she did not accept gifts from rulers nor attended press parties earned her a place of respect among reporters. Because of her rigorous work and sharpness when questioning the powerful, her assassination hurt deepest in the Chihuahua guild.

Miroslava's murder was not the first and most likely not the last. Since 2000, 22 comrade journalists have been killed in the state of Chihuahua, two of them during the Javier Corral administration.

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On the morning of March 23rd, 2017, I was at home, preparing for the beginning of the day. A human rights official called me to ask me what I thought of Miroslava's murder. I became mute. I didn't know she had just been killed. Then more calls and messages started coming in my phone. I answered automatically, I couldn't talk. One of those calls was from Governor Javier Corral, who told me that he was sending an armed escort, without or with my consent, because it was his duty to protect me.

I refused the protection, but still got the escorts. I couldn't believe what was happening. I just wanted to stand with the guild and demand justice. So I prepared for the coverage of the day, the state congressional session, and a press conference with the governor. I needed to be with my classmates, to scream, and demand justice. Scream, scream. I was enraged, I had no fear, only rage.

In the evening, I wrote some pending reports for *El Diario de Juárez* y *Proceso*, the news journals where I worked. But the next few days I couldn't write anymore. My rage and disbelief turned in to pain. I kept the security escorts in Chihuahua for two weeks, and I attended a series of meetings with my fellow journalists to organize our protest in demand for justice, but also our emotional self-care. Over the course of the days, it was established that the deadly aggression against Miroslava resulted from her notes on the incursion of organized crime into the Sierra Tarahumara. Miroslava and I shared a friendship, but also an employment relationship, we shared coverage and some threats that we took for granted.

It was then that expert activists -from outside Chihuahua- analyzed the situation and suggested I leave town for a while. Only for a little time, they said. I refused until the end. I still refuse. It's hard to be away. There are days when I wake up wondering if I wasn't a coward for leaving Chihuahua. But I understood that it was necessary to save my life. That I had to pause. I don't know when I'm coming back.

I've lived through the process as if anesthetized. With the passing days,I have assimilated the fact that my life changed, because I had to leave part of my family and because I left with my daughter, who in turn left her studies, her circle of friends and her grandparents. I´ve lived a strong grieving process, far from my home and community. My priority now is to accompany my daughter and, together, understand what happened to us, to get something constructive out of this tragedy. I used to think that in my coverages, it was best to keep her and the rest of my family on the sidelines, but I've learned that as far as possible they should know the work we do to understand a situation such as a displacement, threats or some of the other consequences of what we do.

I am in a country that is not my own, and from here, my courage and helplessness increases every time another colleague is murdered. The night I finished writing this text, another journalist was murdered in Veracruz; Candido, now I know how he was called. I still feel helpless because I'm outside, because I

had to flee as if I were a criminal, but I'm convinced that we can transform so much pain into life.

Unlike other cases of displacement that I had to cover, in which the majority of people migrate to drift, mine was a privileged case. The CPJ, journalists like Marcela Turati and those I have met in the country where I now live, have allowed me to give meaning to what I have experienced. I found colleagues who have become experts at the expense of falls, pain and empathy. In addition to the organizations I have already mentioned, CIMAC, Reporters Without Borders, Civic Proposal, Article 19 and Chihuahua human rights activists have also joined the group. All of them stretched their nets so that I could tread with confidence, so that fear would not paralyze me. *Proceso* and *El Diario de Juárez* have supported me, the first one allowing me to continue my work at a distance, the second one respecting my decision to resign.

From a distance, I have also allowed myself this opportunity to reflect on my profession. To ask myself if I want to continue with this, how to go on, if I still want to continue carrying this slab made of responsibility, but also the expectations of the people who live under this violence and indolence. Until now I have never doubted that I want to continue being a journalist in Chihuahua, but from here I understood that I owe myself this reflection, that I must also recognize other opportunities that open up for me. This space has forced me to rethink how I want to build myself.

And it's also made me consider the dignity of not continuing. To respect and accompany journalists who, because of threats, risks, fear and vulnerability, decide to leave the profession as a life choice, for life.

In this Mexican era, where more and more journalists are being killed, the guild´s unity is fundamental. And it is essential to continue covering the stories of those who have been victims of narco-political violence. They are stories that transform our own lives.

The courage and dignity of its protagonists forces us to continue.

THREE WAYS TO LEARN SILENCE

Carlos Manuel Juarez

It's Christmas Eve. The new head of organized crime calls Santa Claus: "I want you here or else we're coming for you," he says on the phone. Santa Claus looks at his children and leaves the house. A pack of armed men greet him and take him inside their lair. The boss, as soon as he sees him, shouts:

You think you're a hot shot, you think you're a fucking hot shot?, or who the fuck are you? why do you think you're so fucking great at writing?

Another guy hits him with the butt of a gun.

It's December 24,2002. Today, Ramiro Treviño dresses up as Santa Claus and the rest of the year he works as a police reporter. From the ground Ramiro listens to the crime boss and tries to resist the butt hits, the kicking, the punching, the pain. The baseball bats, the pain, the laughter, the words, the kicking, the music, the euphoric cries of the hitmen extend for hours. He thinks about his children, about the gifts for them, about being Santa Claus. The boss has nothing more to say:"Why do you think you're so fucking great at writing?"

Ramiro was born in the 1960s. He started working as an advertising sales agent for a newspapers in the northern Gulf of Mexico. Later on, he became fond of photography and bought a Pentax K1000 camera, which his colleagues in the newspaper taught him to use. From salesman to advertising photographer, one day, in the absence of reporters, the editor asked him to cover a car crash.

The eighties were languishing when he decided to become a photojournalist. The nineties were a learning time for Treviño. By trial and error he learned how to report and write;

his cheerful character helped him to relate with others, to know the public security officers, the lawyers, public ministries, doctors and nurses at hospitals, and paramedics of the Red Cross; his level of observation helped him to identify characters, links, modus operandi, crime zones.

At a national level, the airs of democratic transition were blowing. But in Tamaulipas, PRIsm held strong with Tomás Yarrington and his friend Eugenio Hernández, who was already a federal deputy. Ramiro was celebrating a decade as a reporter. The editor of the newspaper suggested he write an opinion column. He accepted and titled it ***Punto rojo***

-Red Dot-. As the months of 2000 passed, *Punto Rojo*, a mixture of denunciation, opinion, accusation and photography, expanded from two columns to a half page. Eighty percent of the content was about police reporting.

On December 22,2000 in Reynosa, President Vicente Fox spoke briefly about his plan to combat organized crime on the northern border of Mexico. A month later in Culiacán, Sinaloa, he announced the National Crusade against Drug Trafficking and Organized Crime. The actions of the soldiers, marines and federal police heated up the northern part of Tamaulipas. The following semester, *Punto Rojo* grew to two pages a day.

The drugs that reached the south of Tamaulipas could no longer be trafficked to the border, because of the roadblocks. In Tampico and Ciudad Madero, drug outlets began to open, they were called *tienditas* -small shops-, and the retail salesmen were baptized "*grameros*", and they multiplied. The texts began to mention names and places. One day Ramiro mentioned the aliases of 14 men, the neighborhoods they controlled and he baptized them with the name: *Organización de Grameros de Tampico* (OGT). The next day Ramiro was summoned by the 14 men -who had never met before- to a public park at night. Their silence was focused. The men introduced themselves and offered him money or led so that he would no longer mention them and allow them to use the name he had invented for them. Ramiro accepted the deal to continue living.

Punto rojo also continued. The economy of the suburban area was growing with shopping malls, industries, bars and nightclubs in the north. The Southerners had risen from the devaluation of the peso and the crises in *Petróleos Mexicanos* (Pemex). Crime was self-regulating. Life was quiet, the businessmen, the politicians and the criminals respected the journalists.

The first delinquent to disrespect a journalist was an owner of bars and a prostitution centre. The man read the names of his businesses in *Punto rojo*. After the night watch, Ramiro was driving his motorcycle back home from work when he was hit by a taxi. The 34-year-old reporter was thrown on the ground, breaking his right foot and hitting his head. The company financed the seven months of his convalescence. When he returned to work, Ramiro also returned to *Punto Rojo*. The criminal structure was being consolidated with strong links between the state and municipal authorities. The southern chiefs were independent of the Mafia border leadership until the northern criminal commanders ordered their lieutenants to take control the entire state. On December 23 and 24,2002, Ramiro wrote names and nicknames of those involved in these criminal undertakings.

That's whats got him bleeding here, and having to insistently listen to the question,"You think you're a hot shot? You think you're a fucking hot shot here? Who the fuck do you think you are? Why do you think you´re so fucking great at writing?

After two hours beating him, the hitmen leave the reporter on an avenue. An automobile stops to assist him. One of the passengers knowns the victim, who refuses to go to the hospital or to the Red Cross for fear of being killed there. Ramiro hides in a relative's house. On December 25th, *Punto rojo* is no longer published. At the end of the year, the reporter leaves his hiding place to go to the doctor's office. The family pays all expenses.

He remains hidden to heal his wounds and does not file a complaint. Friends and acquaintances who manage to talk with him intercede with the drug traffickers to keep him alive. Ramiro's story begins to spread around, scaring reporters and media executives; the beating is an effective lesson.

Ramiro recovered in 6 months. When he was able to walk, he devoted himself to selling breakfast, food and clothing for 14 months. In 2004, he went back to the newspaper, to the crime beat. His colleagues found his return incredible. His friends explained to him: a reporter is now the link between the media and the criminals who govern the region; they determine what is to be published, how we cover it, and who is accused. No one breaks the rules, no one leaves that zone; the memory of Ramiro stops them.

Reporters from the police source agreed to cover together the mass executions, the dismembered bodies, the men hanging from bridges, the businesses set on fire. The drug traffickers forced them to accept their money in exchange for the noise or silence appropriate for them. Treviño understood that *Punto Rojo*, the exclusive coverages and the respect for journalists were over.

Ramiro Treviño dimensioned the terrain he was treading and the de facto authorities that governed it. In the second lustrum of the new millemium he witnessed the death of one, two, three, four acquaintances. He photographed policemen, soldiers, children, teenagers and murdered women. He learned of fires that consumed entire families, of extrajudicial executions, he learned many more stories but none were published.

"We don't fix anything, we don't arrange things, we don't compose anything, it´s what´s said, I don't fix anything, if I say it, I publish it, everything is going to stay the same and I'm only putting myself at risk, it's happened to me once, twice, I'm not going to take that chance again" Treviño said.

Today, Santa Claus continues to arrive on December 25th and Ramiro still work as a reporter for the crime beat.

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Omar Dominguez walks downstairs without talking. Victor Perales is forcing him. The first one is a young reporter. The second is his co-worker, and he is also assistant to the guy who operates as a liaison between the media and the criminals who govern the region.

In today's newspaper Omar wrote: "Federal forces pursued and captured a man who was carrying grenades, rifles, pistols and bullets in a truck in the south of Tamaulipas, informed the Secretariat of National Defense (Sedena).

The first hours of the day flow between sidewalk interviews and information gathering. At noon the journalist receives a call from the company: "There is a problem with a note. THESE PEOPLE are looking for you, they want to know who told you about the arrest.

Omar Dominguez is the third child of his family. He has a degree in Communication Sciences from the Universidad Autónoma de Tamaulipas. In 2008, he began to work covering the municipalities of Pánuco, Tampico Alto and others in the north of Veracruz. He learned his trade at the peak of Fidel Herrera Beltrán's government (2004-2010), when Javier Duarte de Ochoa was getting ready to run for governor and the Zetas were taking over the territory of Veracruz. Domínguez concentrated his research on sugarcane leaders, cattle ranchers, farmers and politicians; he built a temperament to cover *machete* and stab fights and wove a network of contacts to dominate the regional section of the newspaper, that was being edited on the border of the neighboring state. He wrote at least 12 notes a day. The violence of the criminal gangs was not part of the Veracruz panorama, that was happening many kilometers above.

In those years, two months before the end of 2011, Omar received five calls. In the first one they told him: we are the Zetas, we have you located and we will call you back to give you instructions. In the following call, they told him how they had killed 10 people and who the dead were. The corpses are members of the Gulf Cartel, he was assured in the third call. In the remaining communications, he was required to write and publish the news. He had no choice, he wrote and signed it the following day. Nothing happened to him.

President Felipe Calderon was beginning to say goodbye to *t*he presidential palace. Enrique Peña Nieto and Andrés Manuel López Obrador were in the middle of their presiden-

tial campaign. The governor of Tamaulipas, Egidio Torre Cantú, was learning how to administer life and death, after the assassination of his brother Rodolfo; Torre learned from the bullets, car bombs and grenades who really controlled each region of the state. The *Tamaulipecos* who could not exile themselves in Texas or in the state of Querétaro -the preferred destinies of the middle and upper classes- assimilated the silence and barbarity.

The fight for the northern Gulf of Mexico territories continued. The rule imposed on the news media from 2003 onwards was enforced with lead, blood and aggressions; the most common practice, to date, is wood boarding, where criminals beat their victim with a wooden mallet on their back and buttocks for long rounds. The procedure was this: the 'delicate' information was shown to the middle man of THESE PEOPLE, who then took the report to the criminals so that they could approve or cancel the publication. Omar, who at the beginning of 2012 agreed to move his sources to Tamaulipas, did not know about this rule. No one warned him.

Now Victor warns him, but it's too late. The newspaper's director approves that the reporter be brought before THESE PEOPLE. Omar boards Victor's car. The vehicle travels through the streets and cruises to a parking lot. They stay there waiting for the crime bosses.

A man arrives at the parking lot and approaches them.

Don't you know you have to ask permission to publish that kinds of notes? Do you know the detainee?

-I don't know him, the reporter replies under his colleague's gaze.

Don't you know that you have to ask permission to publish those kinds of notes!"-The man insists and hits Omar in the face. We're gonna wait for the bosses to talk to you, because this isn't done.

Tribulation increases as the minutes pass. Five, seven, eleven, fifteen, twenty, twenty-eight, thirty. The same people remain in the parking lot: Omar, Victor and the middle man waiting for THESE PEOPLE. Cell phones ring. The assailant orders Victor to take Omar away.

There was a confrontation and the bosses took care of it. They won't be able to come, but the warning has already given - he tells the reporters.

In the newsroom, the colleagues knew where and with whom Omar was. The director tells Dominguez to be calm, to take a day off and stop covering the police beat; days later, he is notified: the coverage returns to normal. Silence begins to take shape in Omar.

Victor reminds Omar of the correct behavior of a police reporter. The assistant continues to operate from the heart of the newspaper's editorial staff. As the days go by, the young man goes from feeling fear to feeling rage, a lot of rage against the bosses who tried to calm him down by telling him that what he had experienced was just part of the trade.

Omar came to know that silence can come in the form of a light car crash, a violent murder, a fire, a robbery, an assault on a woman or a minor. Intuition begins to be decisive in reporting. Writing without intuiting the source of the fact, without asking, can put the reporter at the end of a wooden mallet, a kidnapping, a murder.

"We no longer known what note not to cover to avoid becoming a victim. Sometimes you just take a chance and nothing happens, but we're not exempt from that" says Omar.

Domínguez did not report the assault on the Attorney General's Office. He never received psychological therapy. On the other hand, the system of authorizing information was consolidated: any act involving members of organized crime should and must pass the censor´s filter.

Omar continues to write up to 12 notes a day. He knows that silence creeps in the headlines, in the adjectives. He knows that information is always silenced, made up, with the excuse of taking care of the reporter and the company.

In many cases they ask for the notes themselves. They even send the pictures, videos or take you to the scene of the crime to make sure it´s published... Violence is something we come up against on every corner. Unfortunately, it has become

commonplace and it would be illogical not to cover it -he reflects and sentences- a note is not worth a life and I don't see myself covering social events or sports, I'm bad at that.

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I write while thinking about the phone call from my partner Ramiro Treviño, a survivor of the criminal violence in the Gulf. I had just left the northern part of the city to go to downtown Tampico, when the cell phone rang. Ramiro's voice resounded:

-Charlie, did you go to cover a story on a construction site? THESE PEOPLE people called and asked me about a reporter and a photographer. You went with Francisco? From what they said, I thought it was you and Francisco. Charlie, did you go?

-Yes, it was us. Why THESE PEOPLE? What do they want?

-I was told you turned down a little money. They're pissed off, they said who the fuck do you think you are, and that they want to see you in a while.

-Them? Why THESE PEOPLE?

-I´ll see you at the newsroom, Charlie, and I´ll tell you about it there.

It's 2013 in Tampico, life seems to resume its course away from the shootings and executions. The avenue is full of cars and the autumn sun stings more than the canicular. Four phrases ring out from that brief phone call: "Did you go?" "Who the fuck do you think you are?" "They told me you turned down some money." "They want to see you in a little while." I´m paranoid as I walk in to the newsroom. I get to my desk. I take a drink of water and start writing my six notes of the day.

I download the audios from the protest caused by the delayed paving, to which Ramiro referred to in his call. I transcribe the interviews. It's Saturday and the newsroom is empty. Now, just one sentence tortures me:"They want to see you in a little while."

I write my name and save the file in the computer; I avoid leaving it on the newspaper's shared server. Memory guides my actions.

It was a 2008 summer Friday night. Roel, the conceited 30-something newspaper man, crosses the aisle into the office. Contrary to his custom, he walks quietly and with his eyes lowered. Chiefs Eleuterio and Jose go out to find him before he gets to the reporters' area. All three of them walk into the management´s office. The few keyboards that sound at this time of the day go silent. Silence stirs up a tense atmosphere. The whispers go from cubicle to cubicle. Roel, Eleuterio and José enter the newsroom. No one jokes, no one says good night.

I go to the bathroom and wait some time at the door before heading back. Roel is lying on the desk with his face covered and dressed only with his inside t-shirt. I see his back partially uncovered and red; it looks burnt by the beach sun, but no, the purple spots were caused by something else. He has just been 'wood boarded' for a note that THESE PEOPLE said was not to be published and was published to fill the page. Roel stays silent. He doesn't talk about the how, when or where. We all know why he´s been "wood boarded" here. We all know what for. He was beaten up so that we would all feel scared.

"Who the fuck do you think you are," that's the phrase in my head. I finish my note about protest. With details, with fear, with names that can be removed or crossed out. I write:

"The inhabitants of the colonia Las Américas protested against the company that has not finished paving the *República de Cuba* Street. On a tour of the housing sector, one of the company's employees, who did not want to identify himself, commented briefly: "we will soon begin to work".

Mayor María Guerra supported the complaint and said that the city council paid 50 percent of the cost of the public works to the company, whose name or register she did not mention. In a review of the failures of the public bidding process, this journal corroborated the data of the company in charge: Cepisa Constructora.

The years of the battles that caused the exile of thousands of my countrymen have passed.

The wounds from 2008,2009 and 2010 have healed. Public life goes on with a certain calm, although in the residential areas the ghosts of the kidnappings, extortions and the dispossession of entire fortunes still linger. The PRI has returned to rule the country of the dead that the PAN left behind, under the promise of pacification. Weird things are always related to murky things. The sudden cessation of the bullets and blood is incomprehensible. Where have all the killers gone? What do they do now instead of extorting, kidnapping or killing? The money they've accumulated, where is it?. These questions are quickly answered by simply looking at all the new businesses that have opened in the main avenues of South of Tamaulipas.

I write and wonder if I've written more names than I should have. Ramiro doesn´t get here. I move slowly. I stop writing. I call the chief information officer to tell him. He urges me to continue with the note. I continue. I delete the last two lines. I attribute the company's name to an anonymous source. I change the mayor's words. The writing gets tangled, it collapses. I stop. I talk to my colleagues, I tell them. I try to listen to them to find out the reason why THESE PEOPLE are bothered by a note about a construction company and the government. I go back to the keyboard because "it could be placed on the front page. Don't leave it until you know exactly what this is about" the boss said.

I look for Francisco, the photographer. We meet in the photography area and I warn him not to download the images on the server. I tell him about the call.

-Man! I told you he was weird. Man!, we should have just had breakfast with him. You can´t say no to these people- he says.

-It wasn´t an option

-Let's just see what kind of message THESE PEOPLE bring; I´m going to erase the photos.

-Wait for Ramiro!

-I won't leave anything for them! he says and leaves the newsroom.

I call Ramiro to ease my anxiety. He answers that in half an hour he will be back in the office. The chief calls and orders me to contact the mayor so that she can give her opinion on the matter and finish the note. "Write it down, there´s no problem," he says. The mayor says that the work is already two months late.

Ramiro goes straight into the boss's office. I wait for the call. Nothing. Ramiro comes down and repeats that there is no problem. I deliver the note to my boss. I finish my workday. I go out in to the street, afraid. I distrust cars and passers-by. I lock myself in the house.

The next day nothing is published. Of the six notes I wrote on Saturday, this is the only one that wasn't published. Memory holds me to silence. I remember the stories of Ramiro Treviño and Roel to land in the territory I live in, from which I report. One learns to speak in order to live and to keep silent in order to survive.

The example of others, at best, has served to save the skin of some colleagues. The lesson is learned, it is engraved in the collective memory of the journalistic guild. Ramiro says that in Tamaulipas there are not so many dead journalists because we learned well. From the hits of gun butts, the kicking, the banging, the laughter, the warnings on cell phones, the messages, the wood boarding, the looks from suspicious vans, the screams, the punching, the shootings, the kidnappings, the slappings, the indifference of the government, are the iron that marked, marks and will mark the silenced pages, the ones that have been not been written, the ones we will tell and write on years to come.

Reporting in Guerrero: Between Crime and Militarization

Jesus Guerrero

Germán Canseco, photographer for the magazine Proceso, lowered his camera and focused his gaze on a group of men who had surrounded the car where six journalists were traveling. Canseco did not trigger his camera, because it could have unleashed the fury of those individuals armed with rifles and pistols. And in retaliation, everyone would have payed the consequences.

"Keep your eyes lowered! Let no one see us, you sons of his bitches! We don't want any gossips here! Get out of here, or else we'll fuck you up!" they yelled at the reporters.

They were part of a larger group of reporters traveling in 3 vehicles who had covered the break-in of some 300 armed men who identified themselves as community policemen and, according to their own sayings, arrived in the locality to arrest Zenén Nava, the head of the Los Rojos cartel. The journalists were intercepted almost on the exit out of Chilapa. The presence of two state patrol cars and one more from the federal police made no difference, the armed group still stopped them and showed off their weapons.

"So fuck off and we don't want to see you here again, or else!", shouted one of the gunmen to the reporters.

The so-called citizen police waited just a second for the vehicles to start up before they burst out laughing.

"Fucking cowards!" shouted one of the assailants as a farewell.

This story is one of many that Guerrero journalists live through when they work in areas without any government and

with the presence of organized crime gangs. An intelligence report by the State´s Public Security revealed that in Guerrero there are 22 criminal groups fighting for the control of planting, transferring and selling of drugs in the 81 municipalities of the state. In addition, in some areas of 40 municipalities like Tierra Caliente, and the northern and central zones of Costa Grande, journalism faces greater risks because several small local cells dispute the territory after the assassination of Arturo Beltrán Leyva.

But it's not just organized crime. In Guerrero there are multiple forms of violence. Since the 1970s, with the advent of the so-called Dirty War, the state of Guerrero has remained militarized and soldiers have assaulted indigenous communities, harassed, killed, raped and displaced indigenous people; also the violent fight for political control has resulted in the presence of chieftains or paramilitaries who have incurred in horrible crimes such as the massacre of Aguas Blancas (June 28,1995) or El Charco (June 7, 1997).

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Bernardino Hernández, photojournalist for the AP Agency and local media in Acapulco, recalls a shooting match between municipal police and hitmen -who wore uniforms from the now defunct Federal Investigations Agency- on January 27,2006 in the neighborhood of La Garita, in the port area. He says that that day he was near that place taking pictures at an elementary school when he was warned about the shooting. And he also says that from then on things started to brake down in the port.

"I hid behind a light pole, and from there I began to take pictures, but a policeman stood behind me and I ran to the market, towards a lady that was coming out and was shot right in front of me."

More than a decade ago, crime beat reporters covered murders with knives or bottles in bar fights. But ever since the confrontation in La Garita, and Felipe Calderón declaring the "war on drugs," the photographers´ and reporters´work now in-

cludes victims of torture, disappearances, murders, dismemberment of bodies, clandestine graves, families displaced by violence, Bernardino says, with his 25 years in the media behind him.

Acapulco, according to reports from the State´s Security area, has become the "jewel of the crown" for drug trafficking for criminal groups, because of the narcotics market, both in luxury bars and discos and in the "*narcotienditas*" -small narco shops- of marginalized colonies, where the number of drug executions has been growing since 2006. From January to December 2016 alone, there were 918 intentional homicides in Acapulco.

Bernardino's voice breaks down when he recalls an occasion when he went to the neighborhood of La Sabana, in the suburban area of Acapulco, to 'cover' the murder of two pregnant women who were shot at close range. Bernardino has kept engraved an image of one of them with a child in her arms, whose life the hitmen did not spare either. He also received a strong emotional impact when he witnessed the crime of an elderly woman and her grandson, who were left lying on the floor of their home in the Simón Bolívar neighborhood, where the federal government implemented an addiction prevention program in 2012.

"It was a terrible thing to see a grandmother holding her grandson to protect him from harm."

Bernardino is not clear about the day´s events, but he does remember that he didn't sleep at all because he covered 32 murders at different points of the city, from the tourist area to Acapulco's poorest suburban neighborhoods.

"At midnight there were six assassinated on Avenida Escénica, then another seven on the Metlapil highway, and I finished taking pictures of the dead at eight o' clock in the morning at the Simón Bolívar and Emiliano Zapata neighborhoods.

In his 25 years as a photographer, he says that he has taken over 15,000 images of the dead in Acapulco. From people who have died in car accidents, killed in barfights or were executed by the narcos. On one occasion, in a neighborhood where a confrontation between hitmen had ocurred, he arrived before

the security forces, the ambulance from the Red Cross and the Forensic Medical Service, and ran into a group of hitmen who immediately pulled him out of his car, pointed their guns at him and asked him what he was doing there. Even now he can´t explain why he told the criminals that he lived in that neighborhood and was going to see a lady named Maria. One of the hitmen, a native of that area, confirmed to his comrades that there was indeed a woman with that name there. The criminals let him enter the neighborhood and, in order to avoid any more suspicion, he warned them that he had seen several military vehicles belonging to the Army and the State Police along the way. The leader of the armed group ordered the withdrawal. Berna confirms that he has received death threats from organized crime. On one occasion when he was with several photographers from the port, he received a text message on his cell phone.

"Where are you son of a bitch, you're probably reporting on dead people on the Coast, right?" they wrote.

Because of that threat and others he has received, Bernardino reduced his coverage at night. And when he goes to a crime scene, he tries not to go alone, but with other colleagues.

"The truth is that I am afraid and I know that one of these days, the image of me lying on the street with a bullet, may be photographed by one of my colleagues."

Berna has photographed so many murders in his life that it is easy for him to imagine that his death will be like that and not as an old man´s; he believes this because he has also received two death threats. The last one happened just nine months ago. But more than death, he fears that something will happen to his family because of him. That's why he decided to move to another house, near the beach of Pie de la Cuesta, where the violence doesn't stop either.

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A report by the Guerrero State Association of Journalists (APEG) registers that from 1997 to 2017,12 journalists have been killed in

different municipalities of Guerrero. In this government of the PRI's Hector Astudillo alone, two journalists have been killed. On April 25,2016, Acapulco correspondent Francisco Pacheco Beltrán was shot and killed as he left his home in Taxco de Alarcón. On March 2,2017, in Ciudad Altamirano, in the Tierra Caliente region, journalist Cecilio Pineda was murdered.

In November 2010, in the midst of political campaigns for the February 2011 governorship election, an armed group attacked the offices of ***El Sur*** in Acapulco. During the same period, under the government of the PRD's Zeferino Torreblanca, his brother, Alberto Torreblanca, filed a civil lawsuit against five reporters of that newspaper demanding a payment of ten million pesos for reparation of moral damage. On June 5,2017, *El Sur* published that *Corporación Constructora Analú*, of which Alberto Torreblanca is a partner, had received from the Ministry of Education in Guerrero (SEG) a contract worth 18 million pesos to repair and provide maintenance for schools. The lawsuit against the five journalists (Hugo Pacheco León, Ezequiel Flores, Teresa de la Cruz, Mónica Martínez and Jesús Saavedra) did not proceed, according to a decision of a judge in civil matters.

Before the narco-violence broke out in Guerrero, if something happened to a reporter, it was attributed to the army, a mayor or a regional chieftain.

"Not anymore. Now, everything is attributed to organized crime" states the director of that journal, Juan Angulo Osorio. The difference between camps are so confusing that *El Sur* decided not to report in high-risk areas such as Tierra Caliente, Chilapa or Zihuatanejo. Information on organized crime in those regions is reported from Chilpancingo; other areas of Acapulco were also left out of the coverage due to insecurity. Today, reporters have restrictions on coverages even in the social sphere, as is the case of some community policemen who we no longer known whether they are legitimate social movements or groups used or manipulated by organized crime.

"That is to say, today, reporters can no longer move around freely to cover an event because they can be confused at

the checkpoints, something that has happened with tourists and ordinary citizens, or with seven journalists who were detained by armed men in Tierra Caliente in May of this year" Angulo said. This is the reality of the state where we work; and we are the first to admit we should go deeper, but we are not suicidal, and we can't expose reporters and photographers to life-threatening situations. We have to be careful and cautious in reporting the issues of organized crime violence.

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Most of the journalists in Guerrero work under unfavorable working conditions. There are media outlets, such as *El Sol de Acapulco,* that pay their correspondents 50 pesos per photo and article published. Or, in some newspapers, they pay their reporters a salary of one thousand and up to two thousand pesos a fortnight, without any social benefits.

To complete his family's livelihood, Bernardino Hernández, who has been internationally recognized for his work as a photographer in conflict zones, takes photos at weddings, quinceañera´s parties, baptisms or at school year´s end ceremonies.

Together with other reporters, he sued the newspaper company Impulsora *Editorial Diario 17* of Acapulco, whose owner was Fernando Navarrete Magdaleno, a former PRI local deputy. During the labor lawsuit for nonpayment of wages that lasted almost 12 months in 2012, reporters, photographers, editorial and administrative personnel marched and held street demonstrations in Acapulco, and suffered harassment and intimidation from Navarrete and his company partners. The workers reached an agreement and the current owner of the newspaper is the former mayor of Acapulco Alberto López Rosas (2002-2005), who was originally the legal advisor to this group of workers. López Rosas, a a justice prosecutor during the government of Angel Aguirre Rivero, resigned in December 2011 after the shooting of Gabriel de Jesús Echeverría and Jorge Alexis Herrera Pino

the students of Ayotzinapa who were shot and killed during an eviction by the Federal Police and the State Ministerial Police at the highway on December 12,2011. As part of recommendation I-VG/2012 issued by the Human´s rights commission, López Rosas was subjected to a political trial in the local Congress for his alleged responsibility in this case; however, in 2014 the congress of Guerrero rejected the political trial against the former mayor.

During the administration of José Francisco Ruiz Massieu, between 1987 and 1993, the Fund to Support Journalists (FAP) was created, which provided small loans for the purchase of equipment and life insurance. In addition, it also occasionally sponsored training courses for journalists. But in 2011, when the fund was revived during the second term of Angel Aguirre Rivero as governor, the annual budget of this program increased from one to five million and began to deliver credits of 120,000 pesos for the construction of a house. Most communicators who adhere to this program publish information that is favorable or does not bother the government, usually acts organized by the same officials or daily events that do not affect their image. For Ulises Domínguez Mariano, editor of the weekly *Trinchera*, this program, rather than existing to guarantee a right, is used to maintain control over some reporters. Through the fund, he explains, it finances monthly newspapers of few pages and little circulation that only publish bulletins. In a country where official advertising is not transparent or subject to public regulation, it is easy for funds of this kind to end up being perversely used.

The state government kills two birds with one stone with this program: on the one hand, it sells favors to the media owners, since it frees them from their labor obligations, and in this way the entire agreement is left to them. On the other hand, it earns the communicators' gratitude by covering pyrrhic needs and granting them loans of up to ten thousand pesos.

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Why, despite job insecurity and vulnerability, are we reporters? What good is our work for the community? To answer these questions I want to talk about the attack on the students of Ayotzinapa in September 2014. Since the night of the attack itself, several colleagues responded to the students' call when they were being attacked, despite the fact that they were risking their own lives. On the morning of Sunday, September 28th, we went to Iguala to accompany the relatives who were searching for their children. That day was the beginning of months and years of intense mobilizations of the students, the parents of the missing 43, and the teacher´s union in Guerrero. Reporters were there in these grueling coverage reports that were seen around the world. Reporters have covered the marches, the search, and their demands for justice; we have carried out parallel investigations that have been used by international organizations, such as the GIEI, to demonstrate the failures, the complicity, and omissions in the official investigation.

Four years after the attack on the students, more than a decade into the so-called "war on drugs," more than four decades into the militarization of the state of Guerrero, reporters remain vulnerable. Nevertheless, we have not failed to attend to the appeals of individuals and communities, to listen and denounce the crimes committed against them.

Reporting In The Crossfire Zone

Margena de la O

1

In Chilapa, he was in danger of being forcibly disappeared. In Tlaltempanapa, they put a gun to his neck for taking a photograph. In Tierra Colorada, he was caught in the middle of a shoot-out between community police. On the borders of Tierra Caliente, he was detained and his work equipment was stolen at an armed civilian checkpoint. In the center of Chilpancingo city, supposed police officers pointed a gun to his head after chasing him.

These are five deadly episodes that a single journalist experienced between May 11, 2015 and August 8, 2017 in Guerrero, one of the four most dangerous states to practice journalism, according to Reporters Without Borders' latest assessment. Guerrero is also the least peaceful entity in the country according to a 2017 Peace Index study.

On The Verge Of Being Disappeared
Chilapa, 11 May 2015

"Bring the van, we're taking him!", ordered one of the armed men who captured you. All you could think of at that point was to yell at the local and federal police who were motionlessly watching the scene: "Help me, I'm a journalist."

Long after you begged for help, an agent came up to you and asked for your name. You gave it to him. But he didn't help.

The men who took you in front of the police held you for three hours. You felt vulnerable, with reason. In the two days since the armed men arrived in Chilapa,16 young people had

disappeared. "You´re all done for motherfucker!", they repeated as many times as they could.

You had been taken out of a march organized by the townspeople of Chilapa to demand two things: the departure of the armed men and the return of the 16 youths, who according to family members, were taken away by them.

Suddenly, the armed men decided to release you and you didn't stay to find out why.

At that time you didn't understand the background of this episode: Los Ardillos (The Squirrels), a group dedicated to drug trafficking, born many years ago in Quechultenango, a small part of the Central region of Guerrero, were looking to expand and displace Los Rojos (The Reds) from Chilapa. Celso and Iván, leaders of Los Ardillos and brothers of local politician Bernardo Ortega Jiménez, began to fight for new boundaries to their domain.

What you still can't clarify is the role played by all the local and federal police and soldiers who were in the city during those five days of the armed incursion.

You still can't forget the terrible sense you got when you asked for their help and they pretended not to listen. You were sitting on a bench at the local police station, with your hands tied, feeling the burning heat of the three dry slaps that struck you in the back with the side of a machete.

You should have measured the danger the moment you arrived, when you saw the three boys lying on the ground, bowed by the guns of these barbarians. The same precaution you had last Sunday, when you decided not to run in haste from several newspapers in Chilpancingo: 300 armed civilians entered Chilapa. But you let it slide as if you were watching soyamiche palm handicrafts on any Sunday in Chilapa.

In The Lair
Zitlala, November 8,2016

"Don't shoot!" That's what you heard. You didn't know who they yelled at or why. Your skin was covered with goose bumps

when you realized that if the military hadn't said anything, you'd be dead. It was in the community of Tlaltempanapa, municipality of Zitlala, where one of the inhabitants had you in his rifle sights. Not your knee. Or one of your arms. Straight to the head.

You arrived in Tlaltempanapa this morning in search of clues about the six members of the García Feliciano family who disappeared a few days ago when they were passing through the area. The search was organized by the Siempre Vivos (Forever Alive) collective. It wasn't the first time you'd gone there. In May of that year, you went up the Tepehuixco Hill to look for hidden graves alongside relatives of other disappeared people. That time you all found two such graves with four bodies.

The probability that the relatives of the disappeared would find clandestine graves in Tlaltempanapa was high: some leaders of the Movement for Peace and Justice—the armed men who besieged Chilapa gave themselves that name—had a history in this town.

This background information was sufficient for the relatives to take precautions: officials from the Guerrero State Human Rights Commission went in to town first, to ask the people of the village for permission.

The hypothesis of professor José Díaz Navarro, leader of the collective of relatives of disappeared persons, is that Tlaltempanapa residents themselves disappeared the García Feliciano family to steal the 2015 Nissan van in which they were traveling.

At least you and the other reporters got close to the town. From the entrance, you got a panoramic view of the vans of state investigative police and the military who accompanied the human rights defenders as they returned from their mediation with the townspeople. Your luck could have turned into misfortune: that photo was the reason they almost killed you.

You must have felt a tingling sensation in your body when the man who suddenly came out from behind a hillside whispered behind your head. That moment when you realized why you'd heard it. Don't shoot! Then you saw the soldier who

shouted the order. You were that close of becoming a news story yourself. If you return your memory card, then you never saw the man who could have shot you.

2

Those 100 days at the Immigration and Customs Enforcement Service in El Paso, Texas, were the most hellish of your 26 years.

Martín Méndez Pineda, your problems began with that random comment you made on February 23, 2016 while covering a car crash on Adolfo Ruiz Cortines Avenue in Acapulco. Yes, when you told your partner that the federal police should pour water or dirt on the gasoline that was draining from the federal patrol car and another vehicle, both crushed in the middle of the road.

The problem was that one of the federal police heard you and didn't like what you said. You remember him coming up to you and yelling that they had already done it. You tried to lessen their displeasure by asking your partner if you could both leave.

But the accusation was already an aggression and the aggression quickly became a death threat, without you even realizing it.

The federal police were very angry with you. "They got so angry that they started attacking us and tried to take away our cameras, but we didn't allow them to because we were only doing our job." You yourself filed a complaint against the federal Gendarmerie with the National Human Rights Commission (CNDH). You even testified that patrol number 16218 was the one that followed you as you left.

It took a month for some men that nobody knew to arrive at your grandmother's house, in the Renaissance neighborhood, asking for you. Let's pretend that didn't alarm you. At least not like that other day when you heard from the neighbor that they had asked for information about you, because you realized what they were up to: it wasn't just an impression that they were already hanging around your house.

The safest option you came up with was to get out of the city. You knew that Novedades Acapulco, the newspaper where you had been working for two years wouldn't do anything to help you: the paper had kept you on to cover other reporters' vacations with a salary of 6,600 pesos a month.

It is possible that to make a decision you thought of the homicide rate in Guerrero: 62 per 100,000 inhabitants (Peace Index 2017). Or that Acapulco is one of the five most dangerous cities in the state. Perhaps you also contemplated that one of the last two crimes against Guerrero journalists occurred on the same dates you began to be harassed. On April 25, 2016, outside his home in Taxco, the reporter for Radio Capital, Francisco Pacheco Beltrán, was killed.

You moved to Tijuana, because your plan from the start was to seek political asylum in the United States. But you settled in that border town for a while.

Even with that much distance in between, it took you several days to get rid of the fear, because your cell phone kept receiving threats from the Acapulco area code. Fortunately, you lost that phone.

But the danger alert returned soon, with yet another intimidating message to your new number from an area code from the north of the country.

You expedited your asylum request: on February 5, 2017, you took the documents with you to be interviewed by US authorities. A priority requirement for your application. You showed them the danger that returning to Guerrero entailed.

You were denied in both attempts. The last one was confirmed on March 28th. From then on, you were treated at the Migrant Detention Center as an undocumented, something the United States knows how to do.

"I have experienced discrimination, abuse and humiliation since the first day I was admitted. I was transferred to a detention facility called the West Texas Detention Facility, where I experienced the worst days of my life. This place is known by the inmates as 'the chicken coop', since the 'barracks' are litera-

lly stables for cattle or chickens, designed for approximately 60 people, but are overcrowded with more than 90 to 100 ". This is a fragment of the letter you sent from prison.

On May 16, you were deported to Mexico. So far, three months later, you haven't shown up in Guerrero.

3

You got impatient and finally answered your cell phone that kept ringing. If you hadn't done it, you would have avoided the hair pull and another death sentence: "You son of a bitch!
You are speaking with the Chaparro (Shorty). You are going to get fucked!," the armed man who guarded you said. The baseless accusation that cost you a hit, was your story from the day before, where you explained the purpose of the armed break-in: to stop Los Rojos.

On May 11, 2015, the newspaper where you worked as a freelancer titled your article like this: "Civilians who took back Chilapa now go after an armed group". And your signature: Arturo de Dios Palma.

In that article you described the guard's behavior towards the people who were crossing the road and what you heard them say: "Welcome, from now on in Chilapa there are no more kidnappings, no extortion, no more protection payments. No more killing of innocent people. We are now the municipal policemen."

Nothing like the treatment you received, alongside other journalists, the next day in the middle of the march when the inhabitants demanded their departure and the return of the 16 missing young people. That list would grow to more than 100 disappeared on both sides.

But there was no lack of people who tried to apologize: "We thought they were weapons", one of the armed men told you in a friendly tone referring to the cameras you were carrying. You weren't going to argue with him that he knew you were a journalist, that he had seen you the previous two days doing a reporter's work, if it meant risking your life.

You and the other journalists who lived in Chilapa had to polish their reporting and writing techniques to stay on the job. But with the level of insecurity allowed, those measures didn't always work.

This issue of the level of insecurity allowed is not your opinion, it belongs to professor Díaz Navarro: the municipal police are involved in the drug trafficking and the sale in the Mountain and Central regions of Guerrero, where Los Rojos and Los Ardillos operate.

How else do you explain that both groups were allowed to act with impunity during those five days, from May 9 to 14, 2015, which are counted as the days of the armed irruption to Chilapa, if there were police and soldiers everywhere?

Your guts contracted when you saw the caravan of Los Rojos on Revolucion Avenue that Wednesday the 13th, while everyone ran to hide because nobody wanted to be a witness to what would happen if they came across other armed civilians, whom the professor knew were working for Los Ardillos.

Zenen Nava Sanchez was sure to be among them, because you saw the white Mercedes Benz car and the black Grand Cherokee pickup truck. You had investigated that those were the vehicles used by the leader of Los Rojos in Chilapa, also nicknamed El Chaparro, according to the prosecutor's office.

It's not that you wanted to witness that moment when everyone was fleeing, you were heading towards the local news station to take refuge and then to reconstruct the current situation in Chilapa.

You remember that you climbed onto the roof of the building to see what was going on: local and federal police and soldiers surrounded Revolucion and Insurgentes avenues so that the two groups of armed men chasing each other wouldn't cross paths. You still wonder what would have happened if they had found each other.

4

We're The Press, Don't Shoot!
Juan R. Escudero, 25 November 2016

You never know when you went from covering the self-defense forces shooting each other, to asking for a truce to save your life. "We're the press! Don't shoot, we're press! We're press! We're going to move," you shouted almost in chorus along with 14 other journalists who were trying to get out from the middle of a shoot-out on the federal highway from Acapulco to Chilpancingo.

Self-defense forces have been killing each other for over a year to control the road that connects Chilpancingo to the capital of Guerrero, with the region of the Costa Chica. This time the discord was in Tierra Colorada, the municipal capital of Juan R. Escudero, because it is an extension that joins the two points.

You failed to foresee that if one group entrenched itself in the hills, the other group would enter from the front, as in any battle. You trusted yourself. You've covered about 10 self-defense groups in Guerrero and didn't assess that they only respected their own law.

You probably thought that if something happened, the police, military or any government group would help you. Who could have told you that the spokesman for State Security in Guerrero, Roberto Álvarez Heredia, would deny that shooting at the same time you were trying to get out of it? The rage comes back to you every time you remember him in that broadcast reading the communiqué.

You never wanted to be the news. In the article you published you tried hard not to figure in, there's only one paragraph relating everything that happened to you: "During this attack, a group of 15 reporters were caught in the crossfire and one of the groups fired direct shots at the journalists, causing damage to one of the vehicles they used for transport". You had had enough to even write this, barely six hours after an assignment where you almost lost your life.

You, The News
Tierra Caliente, May 13,2017

You had captured the best photograph of your life for this cover, but it never saw the light of day: in the same frame two burning buses on a bridge in Tierra Caliente could be seen, a helicopter flying and four policemen with their guns pointed at the ground. You only had one interpretation for it: "It's like a war image, no one would have believed it was taken in Guerrero".

If your camera hadn't been taken away from you, you're sure that the German Press Agency (DPA) where you collaborate, would have sent the photo everywhere. You never imagined that the most talked about fact about that day would be your detention alongside six other journalists in the limits of the northern regions and Tierra Caliente. If you google, "Armed group retains seven journalists in Guerrero", it will give you 139,000 results.

You left Chilpancingo before 7:00 a.m. with the other journalists who held you back, with the idea that you would arrive in San Miguel Totolapan. You already knew that some armed men had this municipal capital surrounded by burning trucks to prevent the police from entering.

You discovered the provenance and interests of these armed men in Tierra Caliente while you were reporting. Public Security Secretary Pedro Almazán Cervantes, shouted it when he was trying to stop a truck from burning: "those people who are burning our buses are part of La Familia Michoacana". The Michoacan Family is a cartel that controls the northern regions of Tierra Caliente and Guerrero, which on that day took over San Miguel Totolapan, the most important city for the links between its roads and the Sierra, an area used to grow narcotics.

You walked for at least two hours to find out what was going on. The battles won and lost between the police and people from Michoacan, which were summarized by the dozens burnt trucks by the road, which forced you to leave your trucks about 15 kilometers away from the site of the new siege. In any case,

you will only get to take that war photo and register the public servant's confession recognizing the invader.

You've wondered more than once whether you would have been detained if you'd avoided going to Chilpancingo without a stopover, instead of staying for lunch in the region. In the end it was a couple of hours of sunshine that you lost.

When you saw military men upon arriving at the Acapetlahuaya checkpoint, you didn't even remember the advice you'd been given by a man who shared a table with you at the restaurant: "Better stay here, because it's getting ugly". The soldiers gave you confidence.

You weren't alarmed when you saw the armed men at a checkpoint just a few meters away from the military. They were a bunch of kids. You verified this when they approached the truck you were in. Your partner who was driving even gave them money for some soft drinks.

Your other colleagues, the ones in the truck in front of you, may not have been so friendly, because the kids pulled them over. That's when everyone's detention began. You were pulled out of the car and they took your money, your cameras and cell phones. Everyone's fate was discussed with the leaders. They were also hit men with childish faces who took drugs and drank beer.

They made three things clear from the beginning: they would not return your equipment, no matter how much you insisted, because they kept repeating: "They are for my boss." And if they killed you, they would do it on a low flame: "We're going to burn you alive," they said.

You are certain that this exchange did not last very long, 15 minutes, tops, and that it seemed much longer for everyone. "Grab the red pickup truck and leave. Or stay here and be burnt alive" is the last sentence you heard. Some made whispered claims from the other truck and decided to stay for their cameras, but this was already the third warning, and you didn't want to find out if the third time was the charm.

Fake Cops
Chilpancingo, August 8,2017

You never realized you were being followed by the white Urvan (a Nissan passenger van popular in Mexico). You didn't notice because they look just like the public transport vehicles. There was no way you could have suspected it either, you were only going, with two more journalists, to the eastern part of the city, to take report about a pipe truck that fell into a sinkhole.

You were surprised by a man that you suddenly saw on the other side your car, as you were parking on Baltasar R. Leyva Mancilla Street, in the center of Chilpancingo, at two o' clock in the afternoon. "Get out of the car with your hands up!" he ordered as he put the rifle right up to your head. You didn't resist and got out.

You saw three men standing around you, and four others on top of the van. You were just a few meters away from where you and more reporters get together to write your stories. Several of them witnessed this.

"Hey, we're press, what's going on?" you remember one of your colleagues telling them. That's what got the three of them to put their guns down. But only one of them responded that a stolen car with the same characteristics as yours had been reported. You heard another one say they were federal cops.

You think they faked an operation: everyone was dressed in civilian clothes and no one inspected your backpack like at a normal police check point.

You remain scared for they'll know where you live, because before they left they took pictures of all your IDs. And you only have the presumption that they could be agents of the Ministry of the Interior, because one of your colleagues was barely able to read an ID he was shown.

You could well raise the figure of 94.1 percent of the population living in fear of violence in Chilpancingo, according to the National Institute of Statistics and Geography.

But if the figures are anything to go by, you were one of

the 24 journalists attacked that the Guerrero State Association of Journalists (APEG) had documented from January to the second week of August 2017.

The conflict is that you don't really know who to be afraid of in this city, one of the five most dangerous in the country.

5
The Photo That Was Saved

You heard on the radio frequency the numbers 09,10 and 49, intersection of Juarez Avenue with Morelos Street. You translate the code: a crash with wounded people that need an ambulance in the centre of the port city.

For someone who's been covering the crime beat for the Diario de Zihuatanejo you seldom fail to interpret the police codes, that's what you thought when you saw the black Suburban and the grey Tsuru dented by the crash.

You were surprised that there were so many people taking pictures of the accident, but when you saw the beautiful blonde woman inside the luxury van, you understood. You didn't hesitate to take one where she showed up either.

"It's him" the municipal policeman told the young man in a sports shirt and hat, pointing at you. The boy that you remember as slim and with strong arms, only asked about your camera. "It's there stored in the car," you told him. But you became uncomfortable that wherever you went, he followed you.

You are sure that you had never before seen this man who ordered the municipal police officers as if he were their commander, but you have no doubt that it is the same man that a video from the state's prosecutor signaled out with the name of Ricardo Benítez Servín, the following year, in 2011. But you're remembering the details of that Friday night in April or May 2010, the accident of the blonde, beautiful woman you took a picture of.

He may not have liked that you took a picture, but what irritated him was seeing people swarming like bees in honey

around the cars: he pulled out a gun from his pants and shouted that he would kill anyone who would dare circulate photographs of the crash.

Two things were clear to you at the time: to hurry away and to publish the article without any photographs. So that there wouldn't be any doubt, he warned you himself: "Look motherfucker, if this picture appears in the newspaper I'll fill your belly with led," he said and hit the awning of the car when he realized you were leaving.

A year later you learn that the PGR captured El Mudo, Zihuatanejo's boss for the Beltran Leyva clan.

You know that this port, like other cities in Guerrero, became a place of fear, because you have had to document it.

It is very likely that your latest coverage will include news about the 60 Zihuatanejo police officers arrested in May 2017 for being infiltrated, and that only 20 were finally charged with organized crime. Maybe this explains why the cop threatened you for the picture.

But you've experienced so many more things in these seven years that you've normalized the fact that criminals dial you on the phone to let you know every time they kill someone. "Hey, reporter, we left a person lying on the old Buenavista road for you to take his picture. He was a policeman." You were told about a body that was dumped on July 29th of this year on the Federal Highway Acapulco-Zihuatanejo. Not that you chose such methods, but to cover the crime beat in Guerrero it is best if they know who you are.

JALISCO: BETWEEN PRECARIOUSNESS AND FEAR

By Darwin Franco Migues

-Let's cut the bullshit, we don't want to fuck them up- those were the words heard by **Carmen Aggi** and the ***Letra Fría*** team, a weekly from Autlan de Navarro in the south of Jalisco, when their work touched the interests of organized crime.

The south of the state is a stronghold for the Jalisco New Generation Cartel (CJNG), one of the most powerful cartels in the world today. Reporting here is tricky because various businesses serve as fronts for cartel financing operations in municipalities such as Autlán de Navarro, El Grullo, El Limón, Villa Purificación, La Huerta or Tonaya. Learning to differentiate these businesses and interests is key to avoid dying while doing journalism.

It was 2014 when Carmen heard those words. Fist, the fear paralyzed her, then the uncertainty. She talked to her husband, who also works at *Letra Fría*, and they both agreed not to tempt fate and comply with the order. The value of the information was enormous but they knew that nothing was above their own lives, so they opted for forced silence. The narco threats were mixed with attacks on social networks: fake checks with the name of Carmen Aggi started circulating, defamatory messages about her personal life and even false news linking her to a kidnapping gang

-What hurts me the most is when these threats hit my family... they made me look like a kidnapper; this broke me up and I started doubting myself because an aunt who raised me though childhood called and asked me to quit the fucking job I had.

Carmen Aggi did not quit journalism but she did stop covering the drug trade.

-We at *Letra Fría* are in a truce because we already had problems with them and without even doing any in-depth investigations, only reports about drug seizures or the burning of plantations... The information we published was nothing to make us live the hell they put us through. We had no choice but to shut up.

The threats did not end with the denunciations before the local authorities and the Special Prosecutor's Office on Crimes against Freedom of Expression, but only by accepting silence.

-That day we decided that neither *Letra Fría* nor Carmen Aggi would cover the narcotics trade because if we did, they would kill us. It's really fucked up because they're telling us what we can or can not cover. It is hard but we know that we are alone, there is no guild solidarity in the region.

It's been three years since that decision. Faced with the political-electoral scenario of 2018, pressure from the public authorities is increasing. The fear is not in vain: the attacks on journalists are mostly perpetrated by public officials. This is what is presumed in the attack of May 15,2017 against members of the weekly *El Costeño de Autlán de Navarro*. Sonia Córdova, the weekly newspaper's chief information officer,and Jonathan Rodríguez Córdova, a reporter, who was shot four times point-blank.

Carmen Aggi, despite the attack and the pressure against her, did not postpone the release of the printed version of *Letra Fría,* which began circulating on August 4,2017. In their first edition, they once again dealt with security issues through a couple of reports on intentional killings and disappearances in the region, both of which took great care not to make any direct reference to organized crime.

Assuming the silence

Jalisco has 125 municipalities, state media coverage is concentrated in five of them: Guadalajara, Zapopan, Tonalá, Tlaquepaque and Tlajomulco de Zúñiga. Outside the Guadalajara metropoli-

tan area, journalists such as Manuel Jacobo are invisible: their work is not read and their threats, risks and precarious working conditions are ignored.

"Journalists in this region find it very difficult to become visible because their work is minimized, regarded as lower quality. They don't see us and this increases the risk that we are living in because, in an effort to make us visible, we accept unfavorable working conditions and cover events that put our security at risk," says the reporter for the weekly *Laguna de Chapala*, a coca native.

In the inner regions of Jalisco the CJNG acts naturally. Coverage of drug trafficking is either non-existent or scarce, to the extent that self-censorship is applied before the threats. ***Decisiones*** is a web portal created by journalists from the municipality of Ocotlán, Cienega de Jalisco region.

"We didn't want to live a loss, so we decided that we would address the security and drug-related issues, but not in depth, because we know that if something happened to us we would be alone."

Marcelo Ramírez, who along with Jessica Padilla founded *Decisiones* in 2014, reported the clandestine graves of La Barca from which 74 bodies were exhumed; the ambush of members of the Federal Gendarmerie that took 11 people's lives; and the funeral processions of 28 of the 42 men who died from extrajudicial executions in Tanhuato, Michoacán;

The aggressions

One day in July 2015, reporter Ricardo Balderas was on board a taxi when municipal police officers with long guns stopped the car and forced him out.

"I was inside a taxi and members of the municipal police with long guns pulled me out of the vehicle and assaulted me because they were looking for someone just like me. They insulted me and took my report book away to take pictures of what I had in it" he says.

For this reason, he filed three complaints against the officers, two were municipal cops and one from the state police. "I have never been notified or informed of what has happened to my complaint, I do not know if they were punished or dismissed". **Article 19** has registered 29 attacks against journalists between 2000 and 2017, including that of Ricardo, who is a correspondent for *Crónica* and *Proceso Jalisco*, a newspaper that ceased to be published on August 13,2017 because it is no longer economically profitable for its parent company.

Three years before and under the same modus operandi, the reporter of the extinct *Jornada Jalisco*, Darío Pereira, was beaten by elements of the then Attorney General's Office. The cops said they mistook Dario for a criminal, but during the assault one of the officers told him that they were doing it because "he had ruined a month-long investigation". At that time, Dario was covering the Guadalajara City Council and a political event in the area. The State Human Rights Commission of Jalisco opened an ex officio complaint 6113/2012-II on his assault. To this date, he does not know whether his assailants were punished or not.

"Over time, I gave up on my complaints because those who have suffered physical attacks by public officials have never received justice. Neither I nor my colleagues have received any notification about the progress of the investigations for the assaults we have suffered. Nothing happens here" says Ricardo, in relation to his comrades Dario Pereira, Jade Ramirez or Jorge Covarrubias.

Workplace violence

One of the most common forms of violence suffered by reporters is work related violence. And in turn, this is a space that allows or generates other types of more brutal violence. Almost all reporters are hired on a fee basis, they lack social security and are banned from speaking out publicly to demand their rights.

"This has an impact on the quality of the work being published, but it also has an impact on the journalist's critical stance,

because if they don't have full security, they simply won't risk losing their job. There is a lot of self-censorship because the need to keep their job is strong" says Ricardo. The closure of *Proceso Jalisco* concerns him the most, not only for economic reason, but above all, for the journalistic aspect, since this weekly journal demonstrated how Governor Aristotle Sandoval conditioned public advertisement contracts in exchange for a good news coverage. Silence in Jalisco is quoted through official advertisement.

Repression is not exclusive to the PRI political party. Enrique Alfaro, mayor of Guadalajara from the *Movimiento Ciudadano* party, said media outlets such as *Mural, NTR Guadalajara* and *Crónica* were trash because he believes that they publish lies and do not emphasize the good deeds of his government. After these attacks on the press, Alfaro himself inaugurated the sculpture "La Pluma" in honor of the memory of fallen journalists and writers. The giant feather cost one million 300 thousand pesos. The work was rejected by the journalism guild because they would prefer to get respect for their freedom of expression rather than monuments; the mayor, faced with criticism, replied: "they can do what they like, we are going to go forward".

Héctor Guerrero, an independent photojournalist, suffered from work related violence because he was an AFP correspondent for 15 years and when he resigned, he did not receive a liquidation or any compensation for his work. In his different jobs, he was never given any means to protect himself, and he had to train on his own. In this account of grievances against the press, he also mentions the denial of access to crime scenes and the hostility of police officers who even failed to protect him when perpetrators returned to the scene, something that occurred during the drug blockades of May 1,2015.

Dalia Souza worked between 2014 and 2015 at Radio Universidad de Guadalajara (Radio UdeG) in Lagos de Moreno (north of Jalisco) as chief of information, driver, reporter and producer. For all that work she was paid a measly 6 thousand pesos a month less taxes and without any benefits. Fellow reporters from the same radio station, but in Ciudad Guzmán, published

a letter on June 20,2017, in *Prensa No Disparen* asking the University to review its working conditions. In response, their contracts were revoked. A week before that same university, which fired journalists for demanding better working conditions, founded the Javier Valdez Chair in honor of this murdered journalist.

With this precedent of repression against his colleagues at Radio UdeG, Cristian Rodríguez Pinto, winner of the Jalisco Journalism Award in 2016, chose to become a FreeLancer. He currently works for the newspaper *El Puente*, sponsored by the Diocese of Ciudad Guzmán, where he earns 500 pesos for a three week report. He thought that working for national media would help him, but the exclusive report he made for *Aristegui Noticias* was not paid for, and he was only told that its publication would give visibility to his work. The report was titled:"The plain is still in flames... but the authorities deny it" and he wrote it to commemorate the 100 years of Juan Rulfo´s birth.

Who takes care of those who provide help?

The threat against Jade Ramirez was clear. One day in March 2015, they left in her house an envelope with a photograph of herself divided into nine parts; when she put them together, they left a gap in the middle of her forehead.

Despite the investigation that was opened in the Special Prosecutor's Office for Crimes against Freedom of Expression, there are no responsible parties nor any explanations for the threat. She was a member of the Mechanism for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders and Journalists, and she had specialized in matters concerning El Zapotillo dam, a construction that threatens to flood three towns: Acasijo, Palmarejo and Temacapulín.

Five months after the threat, she resigned from the "protection mechanism" because she was not taken care of. As a result of her own experience, Jade specialized in security and aggressions against journalists. As an action to reduce these risks, Jade has sought to hold several self-protection workshops for

journalists in Jalisco.

-In the Metropolitan Zone there are risks when a municipal president calls us trash or when private police detain a colleague who was reporting on the flooding of a parking lot, but this can not be compared to the proximity of some journalists with power and criminality. In those regions everyone knows where you live, whether it's because public officials went to school with you or because they have a connection with one of your relatives. However, the greatest risk is to believe in the word of organized crime because it is believed that they will respect non-aggression covenants.

Since January 2016, Jade Ramirez has been a Freedom of Expression Officer for the **Periodistas de a Pie** network.

The media kept quiet

Jalisco journalists are trapped in an official discourse that holds that "nothing happens here". This denial has not only made the 29 attacks on journalists between 2000 and 2017 invisible, but has also inhibited the denunciations of ongoing attacks, threats and violations of labour rights within newsrooms.

The aggressions that have hurt us the most have been the assassinations of José Reyes Brambila (17/09/05); José Emilio Galindo Robles (24/11/09) and Jonathan Rodríguez Córdova (15/05/17). All three homicides, to date, remain unpunished. Nor are there any culprits for the grenades thrown against the newspaper Mural, which took place on 18 April 2013. The aggressions against Carmen Aggi, Jade Ramírez, Ricardo Balderas or Darío Pereira are mere anecdotes because in Jalisco, officially, violence against the press does not exist.

Silence and forgetfulness are agreed upon through millions in official advertising contracts, but are also based on the fear imposed by the Jalisco Nueva Generación Cartel.

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Michoacán Style

Dalia Martinez

1

I ask veteran reporter José Maldonado to tell me about the latest threat he received, which has now arrived through his email, but his answer makes me feel guilty: "You exposed me. While I was sitting here in the cafe, a lot of people saw me and two policemen that I know approached me but I didn't want to say hello to them". Pepe is fifty years old and in the last decade has been threatened more than four time; he has been beaten many times and has had countless altercations with the police and military officers. Pepe has become a nervous wreck because he suffers from PTSD. Every now and then he looks around as if he were driving and looking in the mirror all the time. He doesn't even trust what he eats and doesn't like spending a lot of time on the street. If it wasn't for the fact that he is still smiling, even if its a grin, I'm sure Pepe would have left the cafe by now and wouldn't be telling me that, unlike the other threats, this time he's really scared. "Since that day I feel a hole in my stomach, like when you sense a tragedy."

-Didn't you feel afaid the previous times?

-Nooo! He quickly replies. On other occasions I could see my opponent, denounce them face-to-face and fully identify them at the hearings. They often ended up apologizing to me or, in the case of police officers or public officials, their bosses scolded them. But this time it's different. The threat came to me via email and was written by a person who knows me, who identifies me, who has me fully watched. I don't see his face this time. I don't know if he's a ministerial or a state police officer. I don't know anything!

Pepe Maldonado is short, slim and always wears pale colored clothes, without any style. Those of us who know him believe that he fakes his age because he doesn't drink, doesn't smoke and doesn't sleep late. He has been reporting the news for more than twenty years and has been at the helm of a police news portal that he founded called ***Noventa grados*** for almost ten years. Many colleagues don't like him: according to them, Pepe has been secretly taping journalists and public officials in inconvenient situations and without their consent. Pepe says that´s all gossip. "The colleagues attack me because I've got police records from the highest level that prove the involvement of a lot of reporters with organized crime" he tells me. The military has asked me to identify these crafty men so they can put them in jail, but I'm not a whistle blower, let everyone pay what they owe."

Pepe talks about the military because he worked with them, as a spokesman for the 21st Military Zone, based in Morelia. He was appointed by Commander Manuel García Ruiz, who later, in the government of Leonel Godoy, was the secretary of public security. Pepe himself boasts of having been the first and only civilian to occupy a position within a military section. Pepe would have continued to work with García Ruiz, but he returned to journalism and on May 26,2007 he founded an online news agency, called *Noventa Grados*. On that page, Pepe has published a lot of information that the local press doesn't touch. "And I continue to publish what no one puts out because the government, the prosecutor and the criminals have a tight grip over the news media and the source."

By the time 2011 arrived, and brought with it the war between the narcos and the self-defense groups, *Noventa Grados* was already a reference that many people viewed with suspicion, since the data, names and surnames that appeared in the notes pointed to a direct sources from Public Security and the prosecutor's office. Pepe's sources have never abandoned him, not even in 2013, when former Mexican prosecutor Alfredo Castillo was appointed commissioner in Michoacán and information

was restricted for all local media. But Pepe was still receiving important data from the sources he´d built over the years. They gave him what he needed and even a little more than he´d asked for. There were times when Pepe even had access to internal information cards from the public security secretary, Carlos Hugo Castellanos Becerra. From then on, Pepe devoted himself to airing and documenting abuses of authority by the people close to Commissioner Castillo including names, surnames, times and places. Among those mentioned was Rogelio Arredondo Guillén, a director of investigation and analysis at the prosecutor's office, assassinated on July 1,2017 as he was leaving the birthday party of the prosecutor José Martín Godoy Castro.

Pepe tells me that he had several talks with Arredondo. In them, he´d been asked to stop publishing information related to corruption within the prosecutor's office and public security. "He often offered to organize a meeting with the prosecutor to settle our differences; he even offered me five million pesos in exchange for my silence". Pepe says that Arredondo resented the fact that *Noventa grados* hindered businesses that public officials had. "Stop smearing us," Arredondo told Pepe. "Put as many zeros as you want on the check, but just cut it out."

Pepe is convinced that there was a struggle within the prosecutor's office between Arredondo and Adolfo Eloy Peralta, the current director of intelligence. "How do you explain the fact that Arredondo's execution went almost unnoticed? It was a Friday night, and he was shot once and the next day was as if nothing had happened, Eloy baptizes Godoy's son.

Eloy is called *el yanky* and has been singled out since he arrived in Michoacán alongside Castillo as the man who controls gasoline theft in Guanajuato and Michoacán.

On Friday, July 21,2017, shortly after two o' clock in the afternoon, Pepe received an e-mail with a direct and disturbing subject:

The sender was a certain "Raul Solorio" and, it said:

MR. JOSE MALDONADO SOTELO

FOR SOMETIME NOW WE HAVE HAD DISCUSSIONS WITH YOU IN RELATION TO THE ACTIVITY YOU HAVE IN YOUR PAMPHLET BECAUSE A JOURNALIST, YOU ARE NOT. WE THOUGHT YOU WERE DISCIPLINED AND UNDERSTOOD THE SITUATION LIKE YOUR OTHER COLLEAGUES, BUT WE REALIZED THIS WAS NOT THE CASE WHEN WE READ YOUR LATEST NOTES, THAT PROVE THAT YOU HAVE A LOT OF KNOWLEDGE ON INTERNAL ISSUES AND WE DO NOT DOUBT THAT YOU ARE COLLUDING WITH PEOPLE FROM THE INSTITUTION THAT PASS INFORMATION TO YOU BECAUSE YOU MENTION VERY PUNCTUAL THINGS. THE THINGS YOU PUBLISH HAVE BECOME VERY BOTHERSOME TO READ FOR MARTIN GODOY AND RODRIGO GONZALEZ RAMIREZ (HEAD OF THE ANTI KIDNAPPING SQUAD). WE UNDERSTAND THAT YOU ARE NOT AFRAID OF ANYTHING AND WE LIKE THAT, THAT IS WHY WE ONLY REMIND YOU OF WHAT HAPPENED TO A ARREDONDO AND SOME OTHERS AND THAT YOU HAVE A FAMILY THAT SURELY NEEDS YOU. THAT IS WHY THIS IS THE LAST TIME THAT WE INVITE YOU TO LEAVE ALONE ALL THESE MATTERS THAT YOU ARE INVESTIGATING IN RELATION TO US. WORK ON THEM OR NOT. THIS IS THE LAST TIME WE MENTION IT TO YOU. YOU WON´T HAVE ANOTHER CHANCE TO REFLECT UPON THIS. WE HOLD THE POWER, DO NOT FORGET THAT

NOT A NOTE MORE MY DEAR JOSE OTHERWISE IT WILL BE YOUR LAST ONE WE ASSURE

YOU AND YOU KNOW FROM YOUR INVESTIGATIONS THAT WE ARE TELLING THE TRUTH AND WE ARE NOT PLAYING AROUND. THERE ARE MANY INTERESTS AT STAKE SO DON´T MEDDLE AROUND.

Pepe could have sworn that Arredondo wrote it if it wasn't for the fact that the email arrived 20 days after his death. Pepe is convinced that this text came out of the Michoacán prosecutor's office and was very probably dictated or written by the prosecutor himself.

Since that day, Pepe hasn´t been calm and thinks, every minute, about how to get his family out of their native Apatzingán. Pepe doesn't want to go anywhere. He says he will keep still reporting in *Noventa Grados*. He says he hasn't done anything wrong, except journalism.

2

When Patricia Monreal Vázquez decided to resign from the *Cambio de Michoacán* newspaper, it was a night in early April 2016, a week after Vicente Godínez Zapién, the owner, had a meeting with the workers that almost came to blows.

Old Godínez, as we know him in the Michoacán guild, is a logging businessman, a friend of the Cárdenas Solórzano family and a former PRI congressman who for years has resorted to the tactic of delaying the fortnightly payments of less than 7,000 pesos to his reporters or offering them 1,000 pesos´ advances by the drop. *Old Godínez* does not pay social security (IMSS) or contribute to the housing fund (Infonavit) -although he does deduct it from the salary of his 40 employees at the newspaper-. The stories of peers who have turned to Infonavit to discover that their employer has failed to pay the worker's dues, and that they are about to lose their homes due to accumulating fines and surcharges are abundant. Joking and half-seriously, the guild says that *Old Godínez* robs his employees to pay for his trips to Eu-

rope, where his children studied, and to maintain the ostentatious life he enjoys in a cabin he bought in Zirahuén. Paradoxically, *Cambio de Michoacán,* founded more than two decades ago by a group of business people and PRD politicians, is recognized as a "banner of press freedom," and an ally and advocate of social issues and causes that have no space in other media.

Old Godinez's blatant abuses forced Patricia to resign. In the era of social networking, Patricia made it public on her Facebook wall and early April 7. Her text is a kind of personal, cathartic letter, where she explains with a certain air of nostalgia the reasons for her resignation. She remembers her beginnings in the trade, more than 20 years ago, and speaks of the pain and at the same time the anger that caused her to leave behind what has been more than a newspaper for her. Patricia resigned herself for years to the inconsistency in her salary payments and endured the lack of respect for her work as a professional and as a person from *Old Godinez.*

The last time we met, in early August 2017, Patricia told me that *Cambio de Michoacán,* where she had been working as a journalist, lost its way. Old Godinez is stubborn and refuses to remedy the newspaper's illness" Patricia told me that she, along other colleagues, has sued the company before the Local Conciliation and Arbitration Board, which strangely has never acted.

The *Provincia* newspaper, founded in the image of the Reforma newspaper, is now in the debt and has begun to disband in all areas. *Provincia,* in short, is the shadow of a leading media that had the best salaries, the most qualified reporters and long term investigations.

In addition to the pauperization of salaries among the Michoacán press, one would need to add the fact that hundreds of communication science graduates have practically paid to work in the last decade. Patricia believes that journalism schools are leaving aside the essential training of journalists to teach management of social networks, design programs and other skills that, although indispensable in these times, do not provide the basic tools of the trade like professional ethics, let alone the

minimum teaching of journalistic genres. "We no longer have investigative reporters, only meme reporters."

In Michoacán, a reporter's salary ranges from six to eight thousand pesos a month and, in the case of radio and digital media, they pay between three and five thousand pesos. Most colleagues lack job benefits and work for more than one medium, otherwise they would not have enough to survive. They get money here and there. Some colleagues have signed blank documents to receive their salary. That's how sad the thing is.

3

Frida Urtiz was already very restless before being told that her husband, reporter Salvador Adame, had been taken away by some men. The night before, on May 17,2017, Frida had not been able to sleep because of the heat and because of a strange talk that she and Adame had had ours before where he, stripping himself of his reluctance to talk about his feelings, had surprised her by telling her that he had loved her from the first moment they met, that he had never been unfaithful, that they would grow old together, that everything they had achieved together was thanks to her and that, regardless of their lack of money, he would soon take her out of that forsaken district of Múgica, better known as little Italy.

Frida wanted to believe him, but she had a bad feeling: something told her that the pressure would increase against Adame, who had decided to denounce the arbitrariness and opacity of Mayor Salvador Ruiz Ruiz time and again.

Adame asked Frida to marry him one afternoon in May and by December they were already living together. He was 20 years old and Frida had barely exceeded 18. The couple embraced the project that Frida's father Javier Urtiz was involved in: founding a regional television channel that would broadcast news and spread the culture of Tierra Caliente, where love for traditions is as deep-rooted as drug trafficking. Adame and her father-in-law literally built the studio brick by brick, which in-

cluded a booth, an office and a modest foyer. Years later, when Don Javier died, the young couple decided to start a newscast in full form and stop receiving contracts from the city council. "They conditioned their advertisement money in exchange for us not messing with the municipal president" Frida tells me in a quick meeting we have. Frida and her three children have fled from New Italy and now move around constantly, changing residence, phone, and friends. Frida told me that all the hugs, condolences and tributes will not bring Adame back, but among the people who loved Adame they have found a shelter they did not know existed.

Frida and Adame learned the craft of journalism from street experience and by seeing how news programs were made in Morelia and Mexico City: they watched the gestures of news anchors and learned the journalistic discourse. Another thing they also learned since 2008, the year that the crime in Michoacán reached its highest levels, was not to mention the names, surnames or acts of violence that could put the rest of the staff at risk. The one person they kept accurately reporting on was the mayor in office and his cabinet.

Everything became more complicated when the current mayor, Salvador Ruiz Ruiz, sent a message to Adame telling him to lower his tone or else he might regret it. At the same time, New Italy was suffering under a new war and dismembered and tortured people kept appearing in the region as if it were the only form of communication between criminals, and Adame was reporting that battle. On his social networks he published the names and surnames of members of the Knights Templar gang and those who fiercely disputed the territory from the Cartel Jalisco Nueva Generación.

In a region as small as New Italy, the houses tend to leave their doors open and have an air conditioning equipment inside to help its inhabitants withstand the temperatures of more than 42 degrees Celsius that summer brings. The day Adame was taken from his business, on May 18th, it was so hot that the kidnappers easily got in without any surveillance cameras registering

them, and no alarm were triggered. They arrived in a black pick-up truck with polarized glass and no plates. The armed men got out and entered the premises. They asked for him by name, in a threatening tone. A worker, with his face unstuck, ran to warn him, but Adame remained calm. He went out to ask them what they wanted. Despite the insults, Adame didn't get startled. And then, when they warned him that they would take him away, he told his employees: "I'll see you now, everything's fine".

When the news of Adame's abduction spread, everyone took it with reservations: partly because the state prosecutor's office recommended that the family wait 48 hours before looking for him, and partly out of fear and hope, because Frida and her family did not want to spoil the slightest chance of seeing him walk in at any moment.

It was only 37 days after that Attorney General José Martín Godoy Castro gave a press conference and said that a drug trafficker named Ignacio Rentería Andrade and nicknamed *El Cenizo*, boss of the Múgica territory, had confessed that Adame was kidnapped by Feliciano Ledezma Ramírez, aka *El Chano Peña*, a member of a rival gang. According to the prosecutor *El Cenizo* was the one who ordered to kill him and then to burn his body because of a personal quarrel, and for money that he owed him from an agrochemical products business. The prosecutor also slipped the hypothesis that Adame was involved in pornography and/or prostitution; the official evidence: chats, photographs and videos of women who had a relationship and communicated with the reporter. This version is categorically rejected by the family and the Michoacán guild. In New Italy, the rumor points to Mayor Salvador Ruiz as the responsible party in Adame's murder. But the same rumor states that, since governor Silvano Aureoles Conejo's is his protector, Adame's crime will stay in the shadows.

Journalism Michoacán style.

THE BITTER DAYS

Martín Durán

One. Whiskey

Facing a whiskey and a glass of water, just as he always liked, the last time I talked with him we spoke about the prose of Truman Capote and Gay Talese, about the few books I was reading at the time, about the bullets' defeat of journalism, about threats and assaults.

The time had come for me to abandon a project I had been involved in -alongside Cynthia Valdez, Elier Lizárraga and Rafael Báez- for the past four years, a tiny news Web site where we managed to publish narco and corruption stories, and talk about of the victims' resistance and the prevailing political simulation. Just a year ago, in March 2016, we jumped from the Internet to a modest printed edition that we usually published every two weeks.

But now it was the time of bitter days and the war trampled us like a hurricane that devastates everything: the dreams, life, and tranquility of the people in a city mortified by crime and the chaos of violence.

"Get out, *bato,* there's nothing left here to do," he said. "If you need anything do not hesitate to call me."

"I'll do that, Javier, but yes, I'm leaving for almost a month and then I'll think about what I'll do next."

"Do not wait any longer, just go... There are not many options left here..."

The night was cool, the scrawny Culiacán winter was already retreating that night of Wednesday March 15th, 2017. Javier Valdez had called me to the Cariño Mio cafe, in front of

the Rosales square, after he saw a group of young people distributing for free the latest edition of *La Pared Noticias*. He was struck by the fact that they were not the news vendors that usually helped us and he was worried about what could happen to us. I asked him to meet at the cantina El Guayabo.

"No, bato, I don´t feel like talking at El Guayabo, let's make it a quieter place."

Javier came to the meeting with his eternal Panama hat and the seriousness of the circumstances. We talked about many things, but kept alluding to what we called the maze without exit of the drug cartel's fury, a killing machine as we called it, and before which we felt vulnerable.

An interview with the local head of drug trafficking, Dámaso López Núñez, right-hand man of Joaquín Guzmán Loera, first published in the weekly newspaper *Ríodoce* and later in *La Pared Noticias*, on February 19 and 21, respectively, seemed to have sealed our fate and kicked us out of the printed paper format just a year after we started. Javier and his team resisted with stoicism. Ríodoce had 14 years behind it which made it a solid column.

On the other hand, our newspaper was a small, unruly wall of pure survival, resembling a trench. The lack of money, the pressure and paranoia, but above all the certainty of knowing that as journalists we were at the mercy of the underworld, forced our defeat. That's what I said to Javier: "they blew up our trench." I also said we were fucked. That we quit. I didn't want to have anything to do with journalism. I wanted to live, to survive.

The children of the capo on trial in New York had not liked the fact that Lopez Núñez had tried to deny their version of the facts: that the whole struggle between their cells was due to a supposed betrayal of the "Licenciado" to gain control of the cartel, and they sent a handwritten letter to Ciro Gómez Leyva's television program, on February 7th. That's why they ordered their crew to purchase the entire edition of both newspapers. To avoid any other version that would contradict theirs.

The last edition of *La Pared Noticias* was released on Monday, March 13th. It was the virulent response to Lopez Núñez's interview published weeks ago. It included a text sent through an intermediary that offered to pay for the entire edition (we excused ourselves by saying that the newspaper would no longer be printed due to lack of resources), but had to accept their "reply" as they called it; but the most devastating and tragic thing is that we also accepted their money to print it.

"You printed one in favor of the *Licenciado*... now print one in our favor and we won't bother you again," their messenger said. There was no need to deny their request.

The text they sent could be modified it at my whim for style but without changing the content. The headline was already included: "Dámaso: Alliance and betrayal." The night I wrote this document for the cartel, was one of the most overwhelming of my life. In front of the monitor, in the solitude of my room, I wondered if I was not one of those characters in some crime novel that ended badly. I thought of Alfredo Jiménez Mota, the police reporter who disappeared on April 2, 2005 in Hermosillo, and relived his story in my memories, what his father once told me before boarding the bus back to Culiacan, one afternoon in another April, 8 years after Jiménez Mota was taken from us: "Boy, do me a favor, tell me that you won't end up like Alfredo, take care of yourself, it's not worth it to overstep your bounds..."

My undeclared motto since then has been this: to survive the cartel. Maybe Javier understood when I told him all of this: "Get away from here, bato, there is nothing left to do," he insisted, sitting in front of me, separated only by the table, the whiskey and the world. I still wonder why he never told me he had been threatened.

Two. Training

Since then you knew that you'd never forget the first dead person you saw, even if you don't remember his name, if he was a father, a factory employee, an exemplary son who always mind-

ed his mother's calls, or on the contrary, a monster to all. From that day you would remember the trembling in the knees while walking amongst policemen, forensic analysts, funeral workers and other reporters; the cigarette trembling between your lips, the desire not to be so far from the city. All those signs that tell you that maybe this job will change your life. But you would not know that you, who used to write stories and love poems in high school, would end up digging around in criminal graves to expose to the public the stories of their collective drama.

The memory of that morning is reduced to a body wrapped in a blanket, discarded on the edge of a dirt road. The place is surrounded by yellow ribbons, one July morning after the rain. It is 2008. You had just turned 22 the previous February. It's your first day as a reporter. Nobody told you to work the crime beat, but five deadening months as a spelling corrector for the daily paper *El Debate* made the need to learn the trade unbearable and pointed the way to adventure. In the streets, the break up between Arturo Beltrán Leyva's clan and the cartel wing led by Joaquín Guzmán and Ismael Zambada García, El Mayo, was evident.

Encouraged by state corruption, all the groups, including the police and the Army, plant corpses all over Culiacan and its surrounding areas. Before your eyes you see the growth of a cenotaphic city, a nightmare city, a city of a thousand deaths, of interminable funerals on the Emiliano Zapata Boulevard towards the eastern and southern pantheons.

Gerardo Ramirez, the colleague who was your first guide in hell, tells you how it is that you are supposed to work: you let go of your fears because they're useless, you salute the police, the employees of the funeral homes, and the other colleagues who cram up the small road behind the Valle Alto development, and you write down everything you see: a description of the body, the type of blanket it's wrapped in, it's orientation, the approximate point of the find, hourly reports, testimonies, and the curious stares.

Among the sources, he tells you, the best are street policemen and funeral directors. They have more information,

they are in direct contact with the public prosecutor's office, the families of victims and criminals; they help you walk on the thin border where all Manichaeism is erased: eyes and ears that one day will warn: do not cross this line... And you do not cross. And maybe that's what saves you, what keeps you alive.

On the other hand, official sources doctor the information, because they are always interested in sugarcoating reality, and pretending that nothing is happening while everything is happening. But whatever you do, Ramirez reminds you, never fail to meet your quota of four stories a day. So even if it's just for work reasons, you have to consult the official sources.

Unlike the first dead person, you do forget the first story, it fades into memory. An infectious prose that barely murmurs what happened, without diving into the pelagic zone where one can encounter human destinies. Few stories are covered, only those where the rage of the victims speaks and shouts loud, and you can grab onto their testimony to relate a small fragment of the collective tragedy.

And thus you learn the trade, by "chingazos", as Javier Valdez once said. And everything comes up to you at once, and there is no time to count corpses, count bullet shells, count guns or armored vehicles. From 2008 to 2010, most of the media in Sinaloa gave up on naming the groups that were furiously sweeping through the city. Name the people? Never, unless some authority already mentioned them.

So the trade became a juggling game, a tight rope dance, that consisted in ignoring things to sleep peacefully and survive. November 2008. The month closes with a balance of 28 labor workers deprived of their freedom by cartel commandos that were looking for Zetas in a packaging operation of La Guajira, owned by a figurehead of the Carrillo Fuentes clan, an attack on the undersecretary of State Security, and several homicides in Culiacán and Navolato.

Even then you sleep more or less comfortably, that is, until a colleague telephones at midnight to inform you that two grenades were thrown at the entry way of the newspaper that

you left just two hours ago to go home. December 2008: The receptionist of the newspaper warns you that there are three women who wish to file a complaint against the Army. They accuse the military of kidnapping the son of the oldest woman and the sister of the other two women present.

"What's your son's name?"

"José Cruz Carrillo Fuentes..."

She is Doña Aurora Fuentes López, mother of Amado, Vicente and Rodolfo Carrillo Fuentes. A few minutes away from there, a general pulls the entire 94th Infantry Battalion into dozens of transport vehicles and gunships, accompanied by six helicopters, to besiege the municipal head of Navolato in response to a grenade thrown at the local military base. You can't stop thinking that all the hundreds and hundreds of soldiers that are invading the streets, squares and shops, are part of a movie. Nor of the image of the general striding up the steps of the Municipal Palace, taking the mayor out of his office while reprimanding him in front of all his officers: "The narco is here because of you, because you support them all."

January 2009. At dawn the army shoots several men who -according to the official information- tried to evade a military checkpoint on the road to Sanalona, on the eastern side of the city, near the ejido El Carrizalejo. In the morning, a funerary worker (who is already your source) warns you that one of the wounded died in the Issste Hospital. The photographer and you go there to write about it. The identity of the victim is a mystery, nobody wants to say anything. Neither the government, nor the prosecutor.

Suddenly, an alarmed section chief arrives at the newsroom and asks you to step out into the hall.

"Do you know who the dead person at the Issste is?"

"No."

"It's Lambert Verdugo, and they're looking for the person who took pictures outside the hospital."

Life goes on between traces of humanity. The trade is hard and it hardens the skin, like this Sinaloa sun that hits the

mud and transforms it into worn-out leather. New young colleagues come in and need to be taught just as you were taught. You get to know more people, and develop the instinct that some issues are better left untouched. You learn to feel the winds of the hurricane above your head, without submerging yourself in it. Between layers and layers of insensibility you bury your pain, and simply incorporate your sorrow into chronicles that never reflect reality. You are like a surgeon, you tell the newcomers the secrets of the trade: at first you bend and get nauseous when you see the blood, but later feel only numb even in front of open heart surgery.

Among those who practice sincere irony, you call yourselves "the merchants of other people's pain." That's what you are. That is how you see yourselves, you assume, traffic and sell pain in the newspapers, even though the next day no one remembers the heartless mother, the absent widow. On with the show: after covering a mutilated corpse, we can calmly go together and have a quiet taco breakfast of belly and beef cheek. It was a way of surviving, they believed, of facing danger, only to return to a daily routine that was in no way ordinary. "Ah, the horror, the horror."

Three. Border and defeat

At the beginning of 2012, Cynthia Valdez, Elier Lizárraga and I agreed that the news outlets that we wrote for did not allow us to publish freely. The three of us met while reporting and wandering in Culiacan, but it wasn't until the digital newspaper *Fuentes Fidedignas* that we started working together.

In December 2012, the economy gave a deathblow to the source of work that this portal under the leadership of journalist Luis Enrique Ramirez represented, and the three of us met one afternoon and concluded that it was better to start our own project. To choose our name, we exchanged opinions for a week, until it occurred to us, in an idealistic way, that a wall was needed in the same clandestine way in which one scratches and

writes truths, something to be constructed and on to which anyone who asked could express themselves... Let the walls speak, we said. And thus the website appeared: www.laparednoticias.com, where we set out to write what others did not dare to.

The bad part? No news outlet, even those who claim to be independent, can survive without some form of official publicity, so we prepared a folder with our economic advertising proposals and began a pilgrimage of institutions in search of a contract. Cynthia, being a correspondent for the *Milenio* newspaper, had a fixed income. I, as a collaborator with the AP and other media outlets, could survive austerely, and also because I had saved some money for a trip to Cuba that I now could use as a rowing boat in the middle of this shipwreck. Elier, on the other hand, had a tough time until we were finally able to land our first contracts.

On January 7, 2013, with crisp nerves, we made our journalistic project public and thus began to walk down this new path. The topics we touched were varied, from daily stories to more elaborate chronicles and in-depth pieces based on our requests for official information and court documents in which we sank to reinvent reality; texts that can still be read in the "Chronicles and Reports" section that is kept online.

With all the setbacks, the struggles and the disappointments we tried to get ahead, and sometimes fell prey to romantic and idealized notions of journalism, but more than once the absurd reality brought us back to our place. In the span of three consecutive years, now with Elier outside the project, Cynthia and a few other collaborators fought the good fight, with certain ups and downs, but never letting go. To survive the times when our official advertising was withdrawn, we wrote for other media outlets inside and outside of Sinaloa.

In November of 2015, we decided that it was possible to do a printed version of *La Pared,* and we got to work, but again the lack of money prevented us from executing it well. Finally, in late February 2016 we got a sponsor, an owner of rehabilitation centers, who supported us with advertisements and helped us

print and market the journal. It wasn't much but it was a beginning. There was a budding electoral campaign and we had more desire to cover it than we had for money. I must also say that at that time I also thought I had found love, a little piece of heaven, and casual optimism exulted all over me.

As editorial and commercial policy, we decided that the front page of the paper would always be devoted to the subject of drug trafficking, public insecurity and narcopolitics. Many times I spoke with Cynthia about the fact in three years very few people from organized crime tried to stop us from publishing or abandon an investigation, or to manipulate and take advantage of violent events to denounce the navy, army or any government corporation for " human rights violations."

But by the middle of 2016 there was already an incipient war and we were the first to write about it and put it on a front page that was sold on boat cruises and kiosks: "War within the cartel". Perhaps that's when, with the links between criminal groups broken, people began to pay attention. The narcos read us.

They started looking for us during the second half of the year. There was still no overt fight but we could already hear the drums of war, and fear and anxiety began to make a dent, not only on us, but also on the rest of our colleagues who reported on this violence. But the situation became worse when the governor in turn, Quirino Ordaz Coppel, took power in January 2017. Disappearances, kidnappings and murders were a daily occurrence and each time the gunfire got nearer.

Insecurity brought us back, so to speak, to a state where our only security was self-censorship, and although we chose to write only about what we knew, little by little the cartel also began to wage a media war that they had begun long ago, but this time focused on Villa Juárez, Navolato, on February 6th. Something broke and collective psychosis flooded the cities.

Then came declared war in the form of a letter, published by Ciro Gómez Leyva. Maybe that was the turning point for us, because just a week after, someone convinced Damaso Lopez,

or he convinced himself, to give statements to the press denying that he was the devil in person. It was not difficult to find us, and by then we were already accustomed to receiving calls from alleged lawyers or from the alluded crime lords asking to delete a story from the portal, from the fan page of *La Pared*, or to remove photos and videos, some with threatening voices, others with a kind of courtesy that frightened you more than the sound of a barking dog.

That edition should have been published on Saturday, February 18th, but we were afraid to go against a version that even the government had made official. That Sunday morning, when I entered an Oxxo, I saw the front page of *Ríodoce*, and I almost fell face down to the ground, reading in full color Damaso's version. I already knew that Javier had the same information, but it wasn't until then that I knew that, unlike me, Javier had gone full steam ahead.

The rest was only a matter of time. In the course of the day we read in social networks that there was a massive purchase of all the newspapers, but the conclusion of some of my Facebook contacts was that the "seizure" was caused by a the report on the money laundering companies of Óscar Lara Aréchiga, a politician from the PRI party, and not by the interview with "El Licenciado". So we began to finish our edition, but it would not be ready until the next Tuesday.

The front page was similar to that of *Ríodoce*, but we did not have any problem because their edition was already out of circulation. I left the Northwest printing press, cold and craving coffee, when a red pickup stopped in front of me. In the back of my car I had four bundles of the newspaper ready to be delivered. When a voice ordered me to stop, just a few meters from the Town Hall, I felt that my time had come.

So many years waiting for the end and now I felt it, without pride or drama. But in reality they were not there for me, only for the newspapers, so in an operation that lasted about four hours, the whole edition was requisitioned. Tired at the end of a long day, asphyxiated by the heat of the asphalt, and still

paranoid, I invited a friend to have a beer at El Guayabo. There I met Javier Valdez accompanied by Griselda, his wife. When I said hello, he asked if they had bought the entire edition. I answered yes.

"Let's go outside and talk," he spurted out in front of his friends at the table.

Once outside, I told him what happened. I had kept some copies that I managed to hide and save from the requisition, so I gave one to Javier, and we agreed to talk later and to be on the lookout. "The place is heating up, you have to be careful, bato, whatever you need, you let me know."

And that was it. After we had that last conversation at the Cariño Mio cafe, and then came the blind drunkenness that barely made me feel brave enough to face the dark reality. I felt stunned, panicked at the idea of coming home at night and imagining that they were waiting for me. The survival instinct led me to plan an escape route over the roofs of neighboring houses to reach the Humaya River and lose myself forever in that jungle invaded by the city, if someone came knocking on my door. I came to the conclusion that I was no longer happy in Culiacan and had to leave.

I planned the escape, bought my ticket, and on a cool April morning I said goodbye to Melissa, who still slept soundly in the room. I was not going to the end of the world, but after arranging my affairs, I went to seek the desired tranquility, to at least leave behind that sordid world of paranoia. When the plane took off that morning and scratched on the first clouds, I began to feel that I was leaving behind a hell of sorrow. "I'm getting out of the crime novel," I said, or maybe I just thought about it.

A month and a half later, on May 15th, at 12:10 am, I went to the scene of the crime, only to discover that this was only the beginning of a sordid plot that, I now know, is not yet over.

JOURNALISM AND HORROR IN THE NORTHEAST

Melva Frutos

I: TAMAULIPAS

One day in March 2013, my colleague and I took the road to Ciudad Victoria to investigate the assaults, kidnappings and disappearances that plague our fellow journalists, and in the end we fled like cats in disgrace. But that didn´t happen until Sunday morning. On Saturday night we were sitting in a family restaurant, waiting for several reporters with whom we had arranged a meeting. There they would tell us their stories about the gag they´d been living with since the Zetas and the Gulf Cartel began to kidnap them, one by one, or in packs. Only one veteran reporter -whose name I will not reveal- however, attended the meeting. "The rest were afraid and preferred not to risk it" he warned us, whispering, as soon as he showed up. At first, I found his manner of speaking paranoid: he did it quietly, as if someone were listening to us, and he did not utter certain words: he referred to the Zetas as "the people" or by using the pronoun them. He told us that, in those days, the city was on fire, that there were hawks (look-outs) under the stones, and that he was taking a risk just by coming to this meeting, and that the rest had cancelled out of fear. Our colleague must have felt fear months ago, when he was kidnaped, blindfolded and beaten up for having published something that pissed off the crime boss. "I can't remember how many times I was beaten with a wooden board, but I know I passed out." The scars on his buttocks remind him that in Tamaulipas, journalists must remain silent.

Tableteada -wooden boarded- is not a word recognized by the Royal Spanish Academy, but in Tamaulipas it means a *madriza* -a harsh beating- with boards that measure one meter

in length and are manufactured to the taste of the boss: some have handles, others only rustic handles and there are some that put nails on the tip. All the boards, of course, are perforated to prevent the blow from losing strength through the air; thus, each wood blow to the buttocks, back, chest and testicles is as accurate and as painful as possible. The board does not recognize sex, age or source. A young reporter covering sports, entertainment or social events is just as likely to get boarded. If you were sent to the newsroom to cover the quinceañera of a capo's daughter and, for your bad luck, that day was also the wedding of the leader of the other cartel and you didn't cover it, then hold on, because they are going to pick you up and warn you that you won't get another chance" the colleague told us. The punishment is twenty board hits. A similar amount is received if, by mistake, the reporter publishes a football match where a family member of a drug lord is playing and does not balance the information by also taking into account a baseball game involving the rival capo or one his relatives.

In the notes I took that day, I wrote that several times reporters have been lifted up in groups. They are driven in buses to a certain place, they form them in a circle and in the center, *one of them* is giving out instructions on what can or can not be published.

"To avoid being beaten up a lot of reporters have quit their jobs" he told us. Some have opened up businesses that barely allow them to get by. Others left Ciudad Victoria as soon as they were warned that they would only publish notes approved by a liaison, which is nothing more than a gunfighter who thinks he´s an editor-in-chief.

For some time, a boss was imposed on photographers who, at a certain time of the afternoon, met them outside an Oxxo store, collected the memory cards of their cameras and, later and in the same Oxxo, returned with a selection of photos that the cartel ordered, as well as including a written bulletin written by God knows whom, where they warned public opinion that the Zetas would now protect the city.

Article 19 and the **CNDH** pointed out that Tamaulipas was the state where, when violence broke out in 2000, the first murders of journalists were recorded. In that year, reporter Pablo Pineda was murdered; he worked in *La Opinión de Matamoros* and covered issues related to drug trafficking. No authority has clarified his death or reported why his body was found in Harlingen, Texas. Another man executed was Luis Roberto Cruz; he worked for *Multicosas* magazine in Reynosa. The main suspect in his death was arrested, but disappeared from the police station.

On the 2016 **Annual Report from the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression, approved by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights**, there is a special chapter called "Silenced Zones". Next to Mazatenango, Guatemala, and the Paraguayan border, Tamaulipas is at the top of the blacklist. And why not: between 2000 and 2015, thirteen journalists were murdered there; it is the third state in the list of the most dangerous regions to practice journalism in Mexico (Chihuahua and Veracruz are 1 and 2 respectively); and, if that was not enough, there is no single agency specialized in crimes against freedom of expression.

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On Saturday afternoon, before the meeting where only the veteran journalist arrived, I phoned my colleague Javier Valdez. We had agreed that I would call him at six o' clock to interview him about the assault on the comrades in Sinaloa.

-Hello?-I'm Melva, Javier. Can you talk?

-No, but what can I do now, *morra*. You woke me up. I'm sure Javier was joking.

He told me that, in Sinaloa, just the fact of being alive is already a danger and that doing journalism is a daily risk. "Knowing the context of narcotics trade in northwestern Mexico helps you to move around and keep writing stories. Since you can't talk about everything, the context guides you and teaches you what you shouldn´t publish. It's a fucking contradiction. It's frustrat-

ing and it makes you feel impotent, but that's the way it has to be, you have to work under those rules. You don't need the local narco boss calling you to say: "Listen, motherfucker, you're not gonna publish that story". Just by being a journalists and living in Culiacán we are already threatened. It's like in the western movies, where they surround someone and yell at him to surrender. We don't need anyone to yell at us, we have to come out with our hands up and our asses tightly closed.

Javier was killed on May 15,2017.

In Tamaulipas there is a newspaper, ***El Mañana de Nuevo Laredo***, which one day is threatened, another day its employees are kidnapped and the next one its head gets killed.

March 19,2004: Roberto Mora, the editor of the newspaper, was walking home when two guys approached and stabbed him. Local authorities diverted the investigation and discarded the journalism angle as a motive for the murder. Mora had uncovered several links between the Gulf cartel and the state government. There are no detainees.

February 6,2006: In the evening, hitmen enter the newspaper's editorial office. They fire rifles and throw a grenade. Reporter Jaime Orozco is injured by shrapnel; he looses mobility in legs and arms. There are no detainees.

March 9,2010: Three reporters from *El Mañana* - Pedro Argüello, Miguel Ángel Domínguez and David Silva - are kidnapped in Reynosa. The only one who comes back is Silva. He doesn't talk to anyone. There's no judicial investigation. Not even the newspaper reports the kidnapping: there is fear. There are no detainees.

May 11,2012: another attack on the newspaper. Again at night. Another grenade. On this occasion, at least, there are no injuries, only several cars in the parking lot get burned by the grenade. The newspaper's directors announce that they will no longer publish disputes between cartels. There are no detainees.

January 30 and 31,2017: The newspaper stops circulating. It's a precautionary measure after three employees, responsible for distribution in the district, were beaten by gunmen. There are no detainees.

June 24,2017: newspaper executives report that, according to U. S. sources, they know that *El Mañana* will be attacked. In the newspaper they have been investigating the mayor's stewardship: his conflicts of interest, diversion of resources and other corrupt practices that in any other country would send the official directly to prison. The mayor, supported by the governor, accuses the newspaper of extortion and announces revenge. Half of the reporters requests precautionary measures against the mayor's threats.

On Sunday morning, before returning to Monterrey, we ask for our hotel bill, but the man who tends to us at the reception tells us that it will take some time. We agree to come back. We go to the Martins to have breakfast. At the restaurant, my partner and I talk about the horror of living in Tamaulipas. We ask for the bill, we pay and just when my colleague asks for an invoice to justify the expenses to his company, something very strange happens: the waitress asks him if the invoice should be made in the name of my partner, and she even knows his surname. My partner and I look at each other in dismay, unable to articulate a word. We had never mentioned our names before. We pretend nothing has happened. We give the waitress the information, wait for her to pull out, and run away. My partner, whose age has given him enough experience and also high blood pressure and diabetes, didn't even want to go back to the hotel for the outstanding bill. We knew that we had been placed and that, if we stayed in Ciudad Victoria, we probably wouldn't survive it. I stepped on the accelerator like I was stepping on a snake.

We didn´t feel safe until we crossed a look out van that is always parked on the road and documents who enters or leaves Ciudad Victoria. We were sure that he had notified his boss that the two frightened reporters had already crossed back into Nuevo León.

II: MONTERREY

Before 2007, the media in Monterrey published articles on accidents, fires, natural disasters and crimes of passion. At that time,

a reporter or photographer who arrived first, won the note and the image. The competition was hard and good. Then violence came to Monterrey from far away places and most of the journalists graduated as war correspondents: some, who appeared at the crime scene thinking that it was a murder involving neighborhood quarrels, discovered that it was a massacre of the Zetas and kept shooting pictures, others, who photographed the bodies, were threatened and thrown out by gunmen who were coming back to collect their companion´s bodies..

It was difficult for colleagues to make editors understand that competing for a note was life-threatening, that we now had to work together. Reporters and photographers began to move in groups to watch each others backs. The unwritten rule was to travel in caravans, putting the vehicles from the television stations in front, because they had the logo of their companies and that, in a certain way, clearly identified them to the drug dealers and police. No reporter or photographer ever again arrived before the authorities; Today, no one goes to a crime scene until the Navy or the Army guards the scene.

Many of us have received threats through phone calls" one reporter told me in 2013. They have our numbers and personal data. We are working under terror and being suspicious of everyone. They called to warn me that if I published this *narcomanta* -a message written on a blanket and hung on a public avenue- that murder or this massacre, my family would pay the consequences. We were all afraid. We didn't even want to meet up anymore at the Seven-Eleven on Constitution avenue, where for years reporters gathered to await the movements. Many times while at that corner, people just showed up to tell us about some occurrence. I remember one time a guy came in to tell us that they had hung *narcomantas* nearby. Then he came back to confirm if we had taken pictures of it. I'm sure it was a Zeta. Crime beat reporters did not have any opportunity or time to take special courses on personal security. No one told us how we should protect ourselves, nor what was more important: the note or our integrity. We learned everything on the fly. It got pretty

damn hard for everybody. Even for the untouchable newspaper *El Norte*: it was attacked five times; its offices in Linda Vista were set on fire, and grenades were thrown at their *La Silla* premises. A reporter from TV Azteca, Gamaliel López, was kidnapped along with cameraman Gerardo López. They were taken on May 10th 2008, and we still do not know anything about them. This thing was so fucked up that our company gave us bulletproof vests. We just put them in the trunk of the car.

III: COAHUILA

The first and only time I've ever been kicked out of church was in Allende.

At the end of 2012, my partner and I moved to Allende and Nava, small municipalities that are about 60 kilometres from the border town of Piedras Negras. We had the task of investigating an unknown fact at that time: the murder of more than 300 people, all because two ex-zetas had stolen cocaine and the crime lord there did not forgive them. Rubén Moreira, the governor, had accused his own brother Humberto, the former governor, of not having listened to the pleas of the villagers made about the massacre.

My partner and I agreed to travel as a tourist couple, as we had done on other occasions. We stayed in a run down hotel on the main street of Nava. Despite the latent threat of being spotted by the corner look outs, my partner and I went out to a restaurant for dinner. We went unnoticed.

The next morning we headed to where, in 2011, the Zetas had kidnapped more than 300 people. My partner had information that dozens of houses had been destroyed. Arriving at the main square and seeing, right in front of us, a residence that had been totally destroyed by bullets and bazooka rockets, confirmed the magnitude of what had happened. More houses were in the same situation: there were no more windows or doors and the fractured walls were spray painted. It was obvious that no inhabitant would speak about it. The municipal presidency was

not even open and we did not want to seek any other official institutions; we wanted to keep a low profile. Some merchants gave us a few facts. They answered our questions by drops. And that's how we got to the church. As soon as we identified ourselves with the priest and asked him about the massacre, he tolds us "I have to ask you to leave here immediately". The only thing he said was that, very possibly, they (the Zetas) would be outside, watching and spying on him.

We went out very scared.

I met the national group of ***Periodistas de a Pie.*** Its founder, **Marcela Turati,** taught us how to create networks between colleagues. That's why in 2014, two reporters and I created the Northeast Journalists Network. There are about 450 journalists from Tamaulipas, Nuevo Leon and Coahuila who have joined us. Faced with the indifference of the authorities and the companies we work for, we saw no alternative but to support each other, those of us who go out on the street, those of us who take the road and go to places like Reynosa, forgotten towns like Allende or San Fernando, to Guadalupe or Monterrey. Because silence must not defeat us.

A SOCIETY WITHOUT A FUTURE

Sergio Ocampo Arista

I.THE THREAT

On the afternoon of May 13,2017, a group of journalists returned from covering the blockades installed by alleged members of the *Familia Michoacana* on a stretch of several kilometers of the federal highway that traverses the violent zone of *Tierra Caliente,* in Guerrero.

We were seven journalists traveling in two vehicles; With me were the colleagues Jair Cabrera, Jorge Martinez, and Alejandro Ortiz, and on the other van Hans Máximo and Pablo Perez, who came from Mexico City.

Almost all the businesses and restaurants on the road had their curtains down, because of a warning that they would be burned down if they did not comply with the order to remain closed. From there we took to the city of Iguala, along the federal highway.

We passed through a military checkpoint, and the officers asked the classic questions: Who are you? Where do you come from? Where are you going?. I tried to sound friendly and asked them why they were not in the "war zone", where there were several incinerated vehicles. One of the soldiers replied "Why would we go there if you (the news media) always say that we violate human rights".

One or two kilometers ahead, we came across dozens of people with stones and sticks blocking passage in both directions, right on a bend of the federal road. We were traveling ahead of the caravan and the other vehicle was following us. I

took out some coins and tried to deposit them in a disposable cup that a child was carrying, when several more people, most of them children and young men, began to surround the van. Almost everyone carried rifles or pistols and some were drugged. Minutes later, they even took drugs in front of us while threateningly showing their weapons

Immediately one of the two leaders ordered them: Take all their money, you bastards! And it was then that some of the children asked for our wallets and took out the money and IDs. I tried to calm the situation down by telling them that I knew the area well, that I had attended the "Feria del Atole". Although that took them off guard, they kept following their bosses' instructions.

Get them out! the order was heard again. And that's when they got us off the two vans.

We were divided into two groups. As far as I can remember, each of us was surrounded by armed men, visibly nervous. I felt afraid.

Let me talk to the "boss"! cried a thin, shirtless guy, with a gun in his hand while getting high in front of us, apparently with cocaine. He was seconded by another leader, shorter in stature, who apparently commanded the blockade, and who also told us that he was waiting for orders from the "boss" to decide our fate.

After an alleged cell phone call, we heard a scream that was terrifying for us: "Get everything you can find the vans!" Personally, I thought things would get worse. I could see the worried and astonished faces of my colleagues, who watched impotently as children and youngsters stripped us of our belongings without us being able to do anything. They took everything, all our work equipment: photo cameras, video cameras, computers, telephones, tape recorders...

Again the two leaders, nervous or agitated by the drug they´d ingested, walked in front of us and pretended to make a phone call. Suddenly, the smallest one shouted:"One van leaves, the other one stays!"

My colleague Hans Máximo tried to mediate with them for my truck. And a guy pointed a gun at his body and then at his head. It was just a few seconds but it felt like an eternity.

Finally, nervous and more violent, he told us: Either you leave in one van, or you stay here with us, and we'll see what to do with you. Without hesitation we made up our minds, as if we had all agreed that we accepted leaving in a single van.

But before we left, another armed man sent us a warning: "Look assholes, you better not mention any of this at the next checkpoint (located in Teloloapan), because we have look-outs there. If you say anything, we're gonna eat you and burn you up alive."

Obviously, no one doubted the warning. As reporters, we had been called upon to write stories about the terrible crimes in the region: disappearances, executions and clandestine graves with cremated and dismembered remains. So when we crossed the checkpoint at the entrance of the next town, operated by the Tecampanera Police, we told them everything was fine. The truth is that we came back without money, without our equipment and without my truck, that I found days later in a crane business, and that I just recovered.

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By that time, the State and Federal governments had implemented an operation to allegedly disarm the community policemen who made up the Movement for Peace at San Miguel Totolapan, a group with only half a year of existence that sought to confront *Los Tequileros*, a criminal group that, according the inhabitants of the region, is related to the PRI's licensed congressman Saúl Beltrán Orozco.

That could have triggered two kinds of blockades: on the one hand, citizens defending community groups; on the other, criminal groups who wanted to eliminate them. We, the seven journalists, wanted to go and tell that story.

On the road we found 3 burned-out vehicles, a delivery trailer and two vans. When we reached the point known as Palos Altos, that connects with the State of Mexico, and is practically the entrance to *Tierra Caliente*, dozens of automobiles, mostly public service ones, prevented us from going on. We decided to leave the two vehicles we were traveling in and proceeded to walk about 15 kilometres. But farther ahead, we ran into state police evicting the blockades, so we decided to go back to our vehicles, fearing that if we left them alone they would be set on fire. Then everything I just told you happened.

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At the time of the aggression I didn't have a second to think about anything, just about saving our lives. I suffered a facial palsy that affected my ear, but without major complications. The certainties and questions came later. I thought we really could have died, because we were caught in the middle of a dispute between two criminal groups, *La Familia Michoacana* and *Los Tequileros*. Thanks to the fact that we were traveling with a good number of colleagues, things didn't get any worse. Had we´d been less, the story would have turned out differently. Maybe we wouldn't be writing about it.

I reviewed the images of that day, but perhaps fortunately or as safeguard, I don't remember any of the faces of our aggressors. I only remember their voices and their nervousness. It was more than evident that they were ordered to "teach us a lesson". Maybe its my family man instinct talking, but the truth is that I have no resentment towards them. On the contrary, I am saddened by the future of these children and youngsters. I can't imagine what will happen to them in two or three years if they survive the drugs and the violence. And that that cannot be the fate of the poor people of Guerrero and this country.

II.THE CONTEXT

At least since 1960 Guerrero has experienced constant violence. In that decade, popular student movements were attacked by soldiers and 19 people were killed. From those struggles arose what is now the Autonomous University of Guerrero and the fighters Lucio Cabañas Barrientos and Genaro Vázquez Rojas. Other massacres occurred, including one in which 40 workers were assassinated in the summer of 1967 in Acapulco, then17 peasants were murdered in Aguas Blancas in 1995, and 11 indigenous people were massacred in 1998.

Guerrero was the scene of the so-called "Dirty War" that, in the entity, left a balance of almost one thousand people disappeared. And in 2014, almost 40 years later, Guerrero was again the place where state forces attacked students from Ayotzinapa. Several kinds of violences come together in that crime that took the life of 43 students: social, political, military, paramilitary and narcotics related.

The crime against those 43 students shook our society and its journalists: we both became more aware of what is happening in the State and, as journalists, we found ourselves with the responsibility of reporting in greater depth on the violence around this crime.

III.BEING A REPORTER IN GUERRERO

But it wasn't always like this. Some 25 years ago, journalism in Guerrero was focused only on publishing government's statements. Despite the militarization and social problems of that time the news media served power without hesitation. There was no evidence of an independent press, with the only exception of Radio Universidad, which disseminated other kinds of information.

Over the years, the students who graduated from the universities injected a new stamina and determination into the profession and thanks to digital technologies, other means of

communication emerged. This has represented a big push, reporters now feel free to do their job and that freedom also feels like a responsibility towards society.

Nevertheless, at the same time, we now face stronger obstacles to do our work. The violence provoked by drug trafficking groups has led us to self-censorship as a way of protecting our lives and our integrity. Of the 80 journalists who work in the Chilpancingo region, only about 15 of us still report from the crime scenes. The newspaper companies do not support their reporters and they have to assume the risks of the profession on their own. Today it is difficult to report the events, but when we do, we travel in groups to do our work. At least here in Guerrero, exclusive notes are over because everyone needs everybody now.

For several years now, my colleagues have been subjected to aggressions. Without doing a rigorous recount, I can't help but think of the arrest of Zacarías Cervantes, a reporter from *El Sur*, by the PGR -The states attorney´s office-, for publishing news of a kidnapping in a municipality of Montaña Alta. Or Jesús Guerrero, *Reforma* correspondent, who was cited by the Defense Secretary (Sedena) for another publication. This year, Alejandro Ortiz was threatened by a self-defense group that physically assaulted him. On August 20,2017, Antonia Ramirez, a Nahua woman, was attacked by escorts of Governor Hector Astudillo Flores; then on August 24 in Iguala, Alejandro Guerrero was run over by unknown person. That same month, Claudio Viveros, correspondent for *El Sur,* and Raymundo Ruiz, of *La Jornada,* were harassed and verbally assaulted by federal police in patrol car number 12565, during the blockade of the Iguala-Taxco federal highway.

The Association of Journalists of the State of Guerrero (APEG), documented that only in the months of May and June, 17 attacks on the press occurred in the entity, with the municipality of Zihuatanejo, on the Costa Grande, having the largest number of them.

In addition, several journalists like Rafael Villafuerte, editor of the weekly *La Razón*, have been killed in Coyuca de Catalán in 2003; or Misael Tamayo Hernández, editor of El Despertar, in Zihuatanejo in November 2006; or Francisco Pacheco Beltrán, from *El Sol de Acapulco* in April 2016; or Cecilio Pineda, editor of *La Voz de Tierra* newspaper. In addition to the disappearances of journalists Leodegario Aguilera Lucas and Marco Antonio López Ortiz. Again, this is not a rigorous recount, but only some examples of the violence that journalists experience in Guerrero experience every day.

In addition to the violence or the lack of appropriate working conditions, there are the pressures exerted by officials at all three levels of government, ranging from covert to direct threats, sometimes resulting in physical aggression and even death. The government, at least momentarily, has achieved absolute control of the news media in key places such as La Montaña, La Costa Chica, and Tierra Caliente, where by means of covenants with the directors of news outlets, the flow of information has stopped, with a few honorable exceptions. Unfortunately, neither citizens nor any social and non-governmental organization has demanded their right to be well informed. And not being informed leads to terror, to easily giving up more rights out of fear, and, above all, to a society without a future.

AN INNER JOURNEY: COMPLICIT SILENCE OR THE STORY THAT CAN KILL YOU

Norma Trujillo Baez

From afar, I read the headline in the newspapers: "Journalist murdered..." There had been seven colleagues murdered in the port of Veracruz, and for most people, it seemed like nothing was happening. "It's because they publish police related notes" "They were friends with the bad guys...", were some of the explanations offered by authorities to justify the crimes against journalists. But on April 28,2012, the murder of Regina Martinez, wrecked my world, because it proved that it didn´t matter where a journalists lived or what kind of information he reported on. Their news outlet didn´t matter either. She was strangled, and other colleagues, were riddled with bullets.

The issues that Regina and I had reported on made me with doubt whether or not I should continue my work or self-censor it, I was afraid of being the uncomfortable reporter. I remembered how the investigation of the crime against Ernestina Ascencio, an indigenous woman turned us into *persona non grata* with local and federal authorities when they denied the obvious: that members of the Army had participated in the persecution of the indigenous people of *Ixhuatlán de Madero*. Exposing the corruption that has been prevalent since the first days of Javier Duarte's government. Fear was overtaking me. My conscience, however, kept saying: why chose silence? why should I not say anything when a colleague and a friend had been murdered? Should I accept to self-censor myself and accept the governor's version that "nothing is happening"? It is worth mentioning that, in those years, the rates of disappearances were already high, organized crime was already here, with executions, persecutions,

and shootings; it was here, and it was abundantly clear that there was no dividing line between the government and them.

Years earlier, information relating to these kind of crimes was classified as "police related" or "crime beat" and was eventually published in isolation on any page or any lost corner of the newspapers. We did not foresee what was behind them when we reported those crimes, we did not imagine that it was the tip of the iceberg, of some dark, monstrous and unintelligible thing.

That strange attitude between fear and personal ethics, so pre-modern, so popular, so inherited from my mother, made me overcautious, until I could no longer keep silent. Like a contained volcano, the subtle and isolated memories of past aggressions exploded, those feelings that usually go unnoticed, that we minimize out of fear of being accused or signaled out as paranoid or bipolar.

In that internal struggle, my memories emerged: "colleagues" sent by their "political godfathers", sowed my hidden fears with innocent commentaries that affected my conscience and courage; how to forget when we held a demonstration on June 7,2012 and an infiltrated colleague called it a "boycott against Javier Duarte"; how to forget the leaders of social and political "combative" organizations, who feigned friendship to manipulate our information. Or the unsuspected presence of the political police, founded in the years of Fernando Gutierrez Barrios, an eminent member of the PRI party, trained to handle weapons and work as political operatives, and who infiltrated our lives to write our personal profiles.These things occurred in isolation but when put together they made one suspect of a government strategy of control. Those people that the *vox populi* calls *orejas -ears-* are in charge of gathering information about our tastes, preferences, family members and any useful data to help "negotiate" the information to be published. *Orejas* pretend to be journalists of known news outlets, and are accepted by social and political actors. *Orejas* have military attitudes or nice people´s charm; they can be beautiful and well kept women, who record interviews and conversations or personally follow

us. How could I forget that woman who claimed to have come from the State of Mexico, to be friends with Roberto Madrazo and a human rights defender and, why not, a reporter for the *Universal* newspaper, but was seen at night, entering the Palace of Government, to inform the state about the actions and lives of reporters and political and social activists.

Those memories suddenly came back, and moved by the pain and rage left by Regina's murder, I decided to gather Lupita, Rodrigo, and other friends who were outside of Xalapa. I wrote a public letter addressed to Felipe Calderón and Javier Duarte, demanding justice for our colleague, a correspondent for the magazine Proceso, but also for all the murdered colleagues, like Gabriel Huge, Guillermo Luna Varela and Esteban Rodríguez Rodríguez, who were found in black plastic bags, cut into pieces and left on the shore of a channel, just like they did with Miguel Ángel López in the early morning of the June 20t, 2011, together with his wife and one of their children, inside their own home; or in the case of Yolanda Orda, found dead on the early hours of June 26, 201, behind the premises of the *Imagen de Veracruz* newspaper, on the port.

After that letter was published with the signatures of several colleagues, the murders of journalists continued: Gregorio Jiménez, Moisés Sánchez, Armando Saldaña, Juan Mendoza, Rubén Espinosa, Manuel Torres, Anabel Flores, Pedro Tamayo and the disappearances of Gabriel Fonseca, Miguel Morales Estrada, Sergio Landa Rosado.

Armed with the rage provoked by the government's omission, a handful of reporters who, incidentally, were frowned upon by the vast majority of the guild that lived off *the chayos* -gifts-, or the advertising contracts, we began to take to the streets to protest, not only to demand justice for our murdered colleagues, but also to point out that we were in trouble.

Everything smelled of blood. Veracruz could be silenced, as it happened in the neighboring state of Tamaulipas, where they simply stopped reporting on the crimes of the cartels and the prevailing violence in their cities. But this would have been

very serious for our state because our silence coupled with the government´s tune of "nothing is happening",the ever present impunity and the increasing levels of insecurity, were already producing more than 20,000 missing people -a number quantified only by groups formed by their families- If we had not talked about the government´s corruption, more populations would have been left without health services, as it happened in the municipality of Papantla where the Regional Hospital did not exist in 2015, but according to government reports it had been reconstructed and relocated twice in 2012 with 40,497,28 pesos from the FONREGION fund. Or in the case of the hydroelectric project on the *Los Pescados* river, where Javier Duarte's government formed an anonymous company with the Brazilian company Odebrecht, that would have stripped populations of their lands, if we had not followed up the story.

Protesting publicly, as peasants, students and teachers had done, made the Duarte de Ochoa government spokeswoman, Gina Dominguez, say that our call to not celebrate the freedom of expression day in Mexico, and instead protest against the unpunished murders was "a boycott against the governor". From that moment on, the state´s harassment began: two armed policemen dressed in civilian clothes chased after me to subpoena me as a "witness" in Regina's crime. Then politicians, all related to the ruling party and the governor, declined interviews and condemned, without proof, my journalistic writings.

Our alternate voice

From June 2012, the state tried to silence me on every subject I covered. In October 2013, at the Women's Rights Awareness Tribunal held in Guadalajara, I insisted that impunity reigned in Regina's case and that the State only pretended to be investigating. That bothered the State Government and, shortly after, new threats against me ocurred. Not only because I covered topics related to organized crime, such as the discovery of clandestine graves, the collateral victims, and disappearances related to

the state´s police or the kidnapping of five young men in Tierra Blanca, but also for publishing research papers on corruption, the illicit enrichment of the authorities, the diversion of funds to support candidates for elections, the state´s debt, the protests against the educational reform or the energy projects of transnational corporations in association with local politicians - In these cases, there was an additional risk to the threats, since organized crime intimidated the communities to eliminate the opposition.

The hreats and harassment didn't shut us up. Together with a group of young reporters, we promoted the defense of freedom of expression and the memory of our murdered colleagues who had been criminalized by the authorities. We wanted to make our work as realistic as possible and to defend our right to speak freely. Rubén Espinoza was one of the most outstanding among this group of journalists that I met. With Ruben I shared fears and persecutions. I remember that when I met him, he had just been fired from his job as a photographer at the Xalapa City Council, but before he was fired, his boss had warned him to stop sending uncomfortable photos of members of Duarte´s cabinet to the weekly journal Processo "you are publishing these photos, when you know that they killed Regina, what are you expecting?" I remember he told me. Of course, the Duarte administration was upset. They resented our demand for justice and our requirement that their main line of judicial investigation take into account the journalistic work of our murdered colleagues. This is how the group that later took the name: ***Colectivo Voz Alterna*** came about.

But enthusiasm and risk is an unfortunate combination to unite a collective. Some colleagues entered, others left, some abandoned the struggle out of fear, and others because their bosses forbade them to protest; some were even forbidden from interacting with people from *Voz Alterna*. These were the times when no one dared to contradict the governor, that was the policy of social communication: if I can't corrupt you, I´ll discredit you. How to forget that time when we broke into a hearing before the state´s assembly with the Deputy of Public Security Sec-

retary Arturo Bermúdez Zurita to complain about his police that had beaten up photojournalists and journalists that were covering the eviction of a teachers' camp installed in front of town hall on the eve of the ceremony of "the cry of Independence day", locally known as the "howl of impunity" of Duarte.

As part of our protest, we symbolically changed the name of the square Sebastián Lerdo de Tejada, and illustrious Veracruz native and a profound supporter of president Juarez, to that of Regina Martinez, our colleague. It was Rubén Espinosa who put up the first plaque with the new name of the square, a plaque that only lasted one afternoon because personnel from Xalapa´s city council withdrew it following instructions from the governor. Three times we put it up and three times they took it down.

Another important moment for the collective *Voz Alterna* was the creation of the Commission for the Protection and Attention of Journalists of the local Congress, which unfortunately ended up becoming part of the simulation of the government and the State´s Commission for the Protection of Journalists -a stand-alone body, which to this day still does not fully address the problem of journalists' risk and limits itself to giving "institutional *chayos*" or what they have come to call "social support", that is, financial resources for journalists that study, so that they can change their car´s tires.

In *Voz Alterna* we fight for the integral protection of journalists, hence the request we made to the Undersecretariat of Human Rights of the Ministry of the Interior, with the support of the UN, to launch an "Early Warning to Protect Journalists", in which we demand a review of the investigations of crimes against journalists, a review of their working conditions by the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare, at a Federal and State level, and total transparency of public resources used for advertising in the media as well as a reform of the law that created the useless State Commission for Care and Protection of Journalists. This effort resulted in a wake-up call for the government of Veracruz, but in the end it was not implemented and only the signatures on paper remain.

Despite our resistance and cries for help and the aide of organizations like **Periodistas de a pie** and **Article 19,** the situation in Veracruz did not improve. On the contrary, the aggressions against colleagues replicated in cities such as the Port of Veracruz, Coatzacoalcos, Xalapa, Acayucan, Orizaba and Tierra Blanca.

In November 2015, I was already alerted by the threats against us, and I noticed that in the "Plaza Regina", an "*oreja*" was openly taking photographs of my daughter with his cell phone, so I filed a complaint with the State Attorney's Office of Veracruz. A minor was now the victim of bullying by a public servant. In the Public Prosecutor's Office, I was asked to do a psychological assessment and the process quickly became a tiresome game of "come and go" to supposedly "document" the evidence, in order to make me desist from my complaint against personnel of the Undersecretariat of Government. Two years have passed since that incident and I am still waiting for a response from the Special Prosecutor's Office for Crimes against Freedom of Expression regarding death threats that reached my cell phone like "today you will die". For the FEADLE, the crime stemming from that threat was not consummated so I just have to learn to live with fear.

By that time, in the summer of 2015, thirteen journalists had already been murdered during the administration of Javier Duarte: Noel Olguín, Miguel Ángel Solano, Misael López Solana, Yolanda Ordaz, Regina Martínez, Guillermo Luna, Gabriel Huge, Esteban Rodríguez, Víctor Báez, Gregorio Jiménez, Moisés Sánchez, Armando Saldaña, Juan Mendoza, Rubén Espinosa, Manuel Torres, Anabel Flores, Pedro Tamayo, Ricardo Monlui.

The smell of blood never stopped surprising us. Rubén Espinosa had to leave for Mexico City in June 2015, after several episodes of threats, like that time in the heart of the capital of Veracruz, when he was pursued by two unknown armed men. On July 31,2015, they silenced Ruben in the city where he had taken refuge.

Since that April 28,2012, when our fellow journalist Regina Martínez was murdered, the rage continues to be stronger than the fear, the solidarity greater than the selfishness, the conviction stronger than the comfort, to continue writing stories and be a witness of what my country is living through.

P. S. Now that democratic alternation has arrived, the Governmental strategies to instill fear continue, and the accusations against journalists are similar to those used under the PRI regime. Methods have not changed and the State has not been restructured,at least not enough to be able to affirm that the political alternation benefited freedom of expression. Impunity rages on and violence continues unabated. But I'm still a journalist.

Xalapa, Veracruz. Summer 2017