

## TARGETS AND VICTIMS

His dance of death was famous. In 1463, Bernt Notke painted a life-sized, thirty-meter-long “Totentanz” that snaked around the chapel walls of the Marienkirche in Lübeck, the picturesque port town outside Hamburg in northern Germany. Individuals covering the entire medieval social spectrum were represented, ranging from the Pope, the Emperor and Empress, and a King, followed by (among others) a duke, an abbot, a nobleman, a merchant, a maiden, a peasant, and even an infant. All danced reluctantly with grinning images of the reaper in his inexorable procession. Today only photos remain. Allied bombers destroyed the church during World War II.

If Notke were somehow transported to Latin America five hundred years later to produce a new version, he would find no less diverse a group to portray: a popular politician, Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, shot down on a main thoroughfare in Bogotá; a churchman, Archbishop Oscar Romero, murdered while celebrating mass in San Salvador; a revolutionary, Che Guevara, summarily executed after his surrender to the Bolivian army; journalists Rodolfo Walsh and Irma Flaquer, disappeared in Argentina and Guatemala; an activist lawyer and nun, Digna Ochoa, murdered in her office for defending human rights in Mexico; a soldier, General Carlos Prats, murdered in exile for standing up for democratic government in Chile; a pioneering human rights organizer, Azucena Villaflor, disappeared from in front of her home in Buenos Aires never to be seen again. They could all dance together, these and many other messengers of change cut down by this modern plague. We can imagine them all linked hand in hand—hundreds of thousands of victims—gyrating in a seemingly endless political dance of death, threading its way through modern Latin American history. And reminiscent of the Black Death, political murder in Latin America does not discriminate. Expanding beyond the leaders of popular movements, it will take all those deemed sufficiently subversive, threatening, or prone to challenge the status quo. But even they will not satisfy its appetite. Peasants trying to stay

clear of conflict, children anywhere, and the elderly—all these have been its victims. At its most extreme, political murder in Latin America avoids nuance and fine distinctions, erring on the side of excess. When in doubt, kill them all. As a military intelligence operative in Guatemala explained, spontaneous, chain-reaction killings are often necessary: “I am an element of the government and I am seen abducting someone, and [a witness] later recognizes me and shouts out, ‘He’s the one! He’s the one!’ Well, that person, very prudently, very cautiously, must be eliminated.”<sup>1</sup>

And yet, patterns can be discerned. The similarities among victims through time and across Latin America make the case most strikingly that something rather generalized is going on. In country after country, the same kinds of people have been marked for death.<sup>2</sup> This is Latin America’s grand tradition of political murder. The sampling presented here must necessarily be a humble slice of the overall number of people killed, but even at that, the patterns jump out. Quoting from Amnesty International reports, Jeffrey Sluka noted that “year after year” victims of political murder turn out to be “government opponents, members of ethnic and religious groups, and civilians living in areas of military operations.” Groups lumped in as “terrorists” and “subversives” (those guilty of “any activity or idea that challenges the status quo”) usually include “clergy, labor organizers or trade unionists, human rights activists, indigenous peoples and minorities asserting their rights, teachers, students, health and social workers, journalists, and so on.” The typical target of death squad activities, as one U.S. diplomat put it in 1984, “is anybody with an idea in his head.” Expansion of the victim category in “social cleansing” operations to “undesirables” (that is, homeless people, street kids, drug addicts, squatters, prostitutes, homosexuals) was evident in Guatemala, Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Mexico, and other countries.<sup>3</sup> Likewise, David Mason and Dale Krane have noted that the targets of death squads tend to be leaders of opposition parties or movements, rank and file of said opposition, and random members of the public. This highlights for all to see that alliance with the opposition is dangerous.<sup>4</sup>

There is indeed wide, wide agreement on this point in the broad literature on political violence in Latin America. The types of people targeted for political murder are astonishingly consistent. In fact, they quickly become numbingly familiar. And while in most cases investigators focus on individual countries, we can easily connect the dots of a larger pattern that ties the region together.

People caught in the net of El Proceso in Argentina naturally included anyone suspected of sympathizing with the guerrillas, but also anyone unlucky enough to have his or her name in the wrong address book. Journalists were especially targeted, of course, but so also were doctors and social

workers who ventured into suspect neighborhoods, as well as lawyers filing writs of habeas corpus.<sup>5</sup> Alan Knight noted that the Mexican PRI used a good deal of violence against “dissident political groups . . . independent unions . . . journalists . . . students . . . and, pervasively and endemically, against peasants, both individually and collectively.” He was echoed by Julie Mazzei, who avowed that “individuals and groups who threaten the dominance of the PRI and the traditional, regionalized political system” were most likely to be targeted by paramilitary groups in Chiapas.<sup>6</sup> Kees Koonings examined victims of repression in Brazil, noting that those murdered included “not only the (known) perpetrators of armed opposition” but also members of “a wide range of political and social organizations” who might be deemed a threat to “national security.”<sup>7</sup> Joan Kruckewitt characterized people disappeared in Honduras as refugees from El Salvador, students, labor leaders and union activists, secondary teachers and college professors, journalists, peasant leaders, and of course, leftists and their sympathizers. Americas Watch agreed, observing that the victims included anyone suspected of supporting guerrillas, the political left, students, union members, attorneys defending political prisoners, and activists working for land reform.<sup>8</sup> Abderrahman Beggar showed that Peruvian state and paramilitary forces targeted “intellectuals, unionists, journalists, professors, students, and peasants.”<sup>9</sup> Examining the victims of political murder in Colombia, Jasmin Hristov noted the “selective assassination” of “members of social movements and human rights organizations . . . educators, academics, and students . . . politicians and journalists,” as well as the social cleansing of “disposables” (desechables).<sup>10</sup> And Piero Gleijeses, examining the *Violencia* in Guatemala, recognized that “journalists, university professors, priests, and men and women of the political center lost their lives. . . . They died alongside members of rural cooperatives, grassroots organizers, labor leaders, left wing students, and armed guerrillas.” Tellingly, “periods of selective repression alternated with waves of greater violence.”<sup>11</sup> The lists of comparable groups go on and on.<sup>12</sup>

What follows is a taste, a small, controlled tap of the keg. If the spigot were opened wide, the resulting torrent of victims would overwhelm the discussion, and require a chapter many thousands of pages long.

## REVOLUTIONARIES AND FORMER GUERRILLAS

The desire to eliminate the most obvious emissaries of change—the revolutionaries, guerrillas, and insurgent leaders, those actively seeking the reordering of society through violent means—is perhaps the easiest to understand. It seems natural that elites would want them dead.

The model for dealing with this category of troublemakers was clear by the time of the Mexican Revolution. Revolutions are inevitably messy, and lots of key participants end up assassinated, for a variety of reasons. A practice emerged during the Mexican Revolution, however, that would be repeated in later conflicts throughout the region. In many ways this pattern was established, of course, with Francisco Madero, the upper-class leader of a generalized opposition to the long hegemony of the Porfiriato. After President Porfirio Díaz had been removed, Madero became president. Yet the remnants of Porfirian regime, in the person of General Victoriano Huerta, rose against Madero and murdered him, thus instigating the truly momentous stage of the revolution, from 1913 through 1917.

Madero's murder was followed by those of the "popular" leaders of the revolution. Emiliano Zapata, the quintessential popular revolutionary commander, had risen quickly at the outset of the revolution in 1910 to command the Ejército Libertador del Sur (Liberation Army of the South) in Morelos. After Díaz's defeat, Zapata pushed Madero, with little success, to implement significant land reform. Frustrated, Zapata and his followers relocated to the mountains of southern Puebla and promulgated the more radical Plan de Ayala. The Zapatistas resisted outside forces in their region with considerable bravado, taking on all comers from Huerta to Venustiano Carranza (leader of the "Constitutionalist" faction), until 1919. After helping drive the last remnants of the Porfiriato from power, Zapata fell out with the victorious Constitutionalists and refused to cooperate. Unable to eradicate the Zapatistas in battle, the Carranza government demonstrated the lengths to which it would go to engineer a successful ambush. After a feigned defection by a Carranza follower (involving a real attack on a Federal column that killed fifty-seven soldiers), Zapata agreed to a meeting on April 10, 1919, at the Hacienda de San Juan in Chinameca. He was greeted by concentrated rifle fire. After Zapata, the other most important popular leader of the revolution was Doroteo Arango Arámbula, known to history by his nom de guerre, Francisco "Pancho" Villa. As a youth, Villa led a colorful life that crisscrossed the boundaries between lawful and outlaw life. During the struggle he served Madero's forces as a resourceful guerrilla leader, and rose to command the successful División del Norte. Villa also served as the provisional Governor of Chihuahua from 1913–1914. Though he never endorsed a revolutionary plan like Zapata's, he spoke of reform and distributed land to his troops. After being defeated by the Constitutionalists in pitched battle, and giving the U.S. General "Black Jack" Pershing fits in his redeveloped role as a guerrilla commander, Villa eventually made peace with the new president, Adolfo de la Huerta, and retired to his hacienda.

In 1923, however, the politically ambitious Villa was ambushed while riding in his open-air car.<sup>13</sup>

The Mexican murders were followed by those of other prominent guerrilla leaders and revolutionaries throughout the twentieth century. One important victim was Augusto “César” Sandino in Nicaragua, the illegitimate son of a well-to-do landowner. As a young man in the 1920s Sandino spent time in Honduras, Guatemala, and especially Mexico. In Mexico he imbibed a motley assortment of intellectual influences, ranging from spiritualism to communist radicalism to the revolutionary regime’s homegrown ideology of *mestizaje*, which stressed the importance of the indigenous heritage in the racial and cultural mix of Latin American societies. He returned to Nicaragua in time to bootstrap his way into a position of command on the Liberal party side in the Constitutionalist War of 1926. After other Liberal leaders, pressured by the United States, signed a truce with the Conservative government in 1927, Sandino declared war on the “Colossus of the North” as “the enemy of our race” and began attacking the U.S. Marines sent to enforce the peace. Fighting in the name of “Indo-Hispanic” America, Sandino’s campaign drew admiration from across Latin America, as well as from the Soviet Union and the Comintern. Though his forces often suffered at the hands of the Marines, Sandino survived and effectively resisted U.S. forces with guerrilla tactics until their withdrawal in January of 1933. Sandino vowed his loyalty to the new Nicaraguan President and disbanded his followers, in return for which he and his people were granted amnesty and control over the territory they were given to establish agricultural cooperatives. But Sandino also had political ambitions. Thus in February 1934, Anastasio Somoza García had Sandino kidnapped by the Guardia and executed. The next day the Guardia fell on Sandino’s followers and massacred them.<sup>14</sup>

Another victim was Guadalupe Salcedo, one of the most successful Liberal guerrilla leaders of the Violencia in Colombia. Salcedo was certainly the best known of those operating in the eastern plains, or Los Llanos, between 1949 and the 1953 amnesty offered by General Gustavo Rojas Pinilla. Official repression was especially harsh in “Liberal” areas such as the Llanos. Salcedo was a cowboy and expert horseman, unsurpassed in his own environment. He developed into a master of guerrilla tactics, and was renowned for the defeat he inflicted on the army at Orocué in 1952, where he wiped out an entire column. Yet after the June 13, 1953, “golpe de opinion,” in which the reunited Liberal and Conservative elites backed the new Rojas Pinilla government, Salcedo responded to the offer of a cease fire and amnesty. In September Salcedo led three hundred followers

to sign a peace accord. Unfortunately, there were insufficient guarantees for the safety of demobilized Liberals (a pattern that would repeat itself). Salcedo retired to his finca, but did not cease all political activities. On June 6, 1957, he was assassinated in a Bogotá cantina in the south of the city. Surrounded by the police, he came out with his hands up. The police opened fire, killing him and his companions. Salcedo was “exploring the possibilities of coordinating guerrilla solidarity” with Liberals in the Sumapaz region when he was killed.<sup>15</sup>

A later example from Panama was that of Hugo Spadafora Franco. A Panamanian medical doctor, Spadafora fought with guerrilla fighters in West Africa, served as Vice-Minister of Health under the Omar Torrijos regime, and formed a group to fight the Somoza regime in neighboring Nicaragua. After the 1979 Revolution, he joined the Sandanistas, though he later went back to Panama to oppose Manuel Noriega, and publically criticized the dictator for his drug connections. Noriega’s regional commander, who grabbed and tortured Spadafora, referred to him as a “rabid dog.” Noriega asked him if he knew what to do with a dog with rabies. Spadafora was beheaded.<sup>16</sup>

But easily the most famous case was that of Ernesto “Che” Guevara. An Argentine by birth, a medical doctor, intellectual, theorist on economic, political, and military affairs, and one of the most influential guerrilla leaders in history, Guevara was among the key leaders of the Cuban revolution of 1959. But more important, he came to be associated with the idea of world revolution. Guevara spoke of creating “one, two, many Vietnams,” in the effort to overburden leading capitalist states (especially the United States) and overthrow them. Perhaps even more than Fidel Castro, El Che became the most prominent embodiment of the leftist ideal of revolution in the 1960s, an advocate of armed struggle against class exploitation, and a true believer in the importance of freeing mankind’s innate morality in order to create a new society. To the elites of his day, Guevara was the most dangerous messenger of change in the world. As a peripatetic medical student and young physician, Guevara witnessed the social and economic inequalities of Latin America and came to rage against the forces of “monopoly” capitalism and “imperialism.” He joined Fidel Castro’s band of revolutionaries as a medic but quickly became a successful guerrilla commander in his own right. After the fighting ended, Guevara served in various high-level posts in the revolutionary government, wrote memoirs and manuals on guerrilla warfare, and traveled as a diplomat with rock star status. Yet he saw his true calling as a guerrilla commander. After an unsuccessful attempt to export revolution to the Congo, he returned to Latin America to prove his “foco” theory.

The outlines of his disastrous incursion into Bolivia are well known. Guevara did not count on the effectiveness of U.S. anti-insurgent training. He also expected assistance from the Bolivia Communists, and from Cuba, none of which materialized. Thus, despite some early victories, his small force of fifty guerrillas quickly found itself outmatched by the Bolivian army, which had received training from the CIA and U.S. Army Rangers (indeed, U.S. personnel were on hand for his capture). With a large part of his force destroyed, and given his bad personal relations with the Bolivian Communist party, Guevara found himself in desperate straits by October of 1967. After an informant betrayed his location, the Bolivian army captured Guevara on October 7. They held him for two days before Bolivian President René Barrientos ordered his execution. Guevara was shot so as to appear to have died in a firefight.

Che seems to have had a death wish most of his life. From an early age he had suffered from acute asthma, and always felt near death. In a poem the young Guevara wrote in 1947, he indicated that he wanted to overcome the “destiny” of a “drowning” death, and “to die fighting.” In 1952 he wrote that “I see myself being sacrificed to the authentic revolution.” Che went to Bolivia to do or die, seemingly “finding death on the battlefield preferable to an agonizing death” as a Cuban bureaucrat. He told the head of the Bolivian Communist Party that “the only way I will leave is dead.”<sup>17</sup> The murderous elites happily obliged him.

### POPULAR POLITICIANS

Populist and leftist politicians who call for change, often times members of the elite who speak for the pueblo, can have almost as short a life expectancy as demobilized revolutionaries. Some have been killed under murky circumstances.<sup>18</sup> Yet taken together they represent a disturbing pattern; if not, then this history points to an improbable number of “lone gunmen.”

Jorge Eliécer Gaitán was the pivotal political figure in Colombia during the twentieth century. He rose to political prominence as the champion of banana workers mowed down by government machine guns in Ciénaga, Magdalena on December 6, 1928.<sup>19</sup> Emerging from the left wing of the Liberal party, Gaitán came to embody the hopes and demands of the working- and middle-class pueblo and threaten the stable workings of the two-party system from 1928 through 1948. While some students have questioned whether Gaitán’s death was the product of an actual oligarchic plot,<sup>20</sup> his death did show how effectively an assassination, or a whole slew

of them, could derail a big political movement. Kennedyesque mysteries about “who” killed someone in Latin America are relatively rare (the case of Gaitán is one of the few) because for such murders to have political value perpetrators generally prefer for it to be widely “known” who was behind them, to discourage other such messengers of change. Obscurity can also be effective, but aficionados of political murder generally assume that “dark forces of reaction” are in play and rarely accept “single shooter” or “random act” theories.

Indeed, running for president in Colombia can be particularly dangerous. After Gaitán, the single most traumatic assassination was that of Luís Carlos Galán, a Colombian journalist turned Liberal politician. Born in 1943, his father was persecuted for being a Liberal after Gaitán’s murder and moved the family to Bogotá in 1949. From his student days, Galán was politically active on the Liberal left, and was even jailed for a night as a fourteen-year-old after attending a rally against the government of General Rojas Pinilla. As a student at the Jesuit Universidad Javeriana he became a more centrist Liberal and gravitated toward journalism. After graduation in 1965, he started writing for *El Tiempo* of Bogotá, as well as the weekly *Nueva Frontera*. He often railed against the influences of the emerging drug trade, old-boy politics, and the loss of collective values. He also became involved in socially progressive Liberal politics, beginning in 1970 when President Misael Pastrana appointed him Minister of Education. He went to Italy as Colombian ambassador, served as Senator for the department of Santander, and was elected city councilman for Bogotá. He started a new faction of the Liberal party known as “Nuevo Liberalismo” and ran for president in 1982, losing to Belisario Betancur, and coming in third behind the official Liberal candidate, former president Alfonso López Michelsen. After returning to the Liberal fold in 1987, Galán became ever more popular as a result of his loud condemnations of drug traffickers and calls for their extradition to the United States. When he announced his new presidential campaign in July 1989, his popularity with voters surged. A much-concerned Pablo Escobar began a campaign of threats against Galán and his family, and finally, on August 18, 1989, Escobar’s hit men shot him down before television cameras at a rally in Soacha, Cundinamarca.<sup>21</sup> Galán, though not much of a threat to traditional elites, nor a clear agent of change to the established status quo, nevertheless threatened newer, more violent, criminal elite sectors. And his campaign for extradition of narcos represented popular frustration with growing narco power.

What is dangerous for Liberals proved even more deadly for leftist candidates. Jaime Pardo Leal was the presidential candidate of the Unión



Patriótica in the 1986 elections. At that moment, the entire movement was being targeted by paramilitaries. He came in third, with only 4.5 percent of the vote. But even that showing was too much of a threat. On October 11, 1987, Pardo Leal was shot by a fourteen-year-old sicario with connections to the drug trade and its paramilitary wing. Bernardo Jaramillo, who took over the leadership of the UP after the murder of Pardo Leal, moved to distance the party from the FARC. He was killed in Bogotá on March 22, 1990, during his presidential campaign. A similar fate befell the dashing and charismatic leader of the M-19, Carlos Pizarro Leongómez. After periods of study at the Universidad Javeriana and the Universidad Nacional, this son of a Colombian admiral joined the FARC at age eighteen. Thereafter, because of disagreements with FARC leaders, he helped found the M-19 in 1973. He was captured by the military in 1979, and tortured. He was amnestied under Betancur in 1982, and though he returned to guerrilla struggles periodically throughout the rest of the 1980s, he also made attempts at negotiated peace. He finally helped demobilize the guerrilla movement in December 1989, and subsequently founded the new M-19 political party. As the M-19's presidential candidate, Pizarro was assassinated while traveling on a commercial flight on April 26, 1990.<sup>22</sup>

Of course, this was not just a Colombian phenomenon. The most famous case of murder of a political leader was that of Salvador Allende in Chile, though it should be included with qualifications. It is widely accepted that Allende likely committed suicide as the Chilean army attacked the presidential palace, but to exclude him would be letting Augusto Pinochet and his comrades off on an unreasonable technicality. In a court of law, Allende's death would be manslaughter at least, or more likely felony murder.

### **JOURNALISTS, ACADEMICS, INTELLECTUALS, ARTISTS, AND TEACHERS**

People associated with ideas, and their transmission, are also natural targets. Isaiah Berlin spoke of the "Russian" concept of intelligentsia, in which the natural and even necessary role of the artist is to criticize the status quo. Latin American intellectuals in the twentieth century largely agreed with this view. Elites were less enamored of it.

Journalists in particular have been targeted consistently. Perhaps the best-documented murder of a journalist was that of Bill Stewart, a television reporter for ABC news. On June 20, 1979, Stewart was driving in Managua, followed by his camera crew, when they were stopped at a checkpoint by

the Guardia Nacional. As his crew filmed (unnoticed by the soldiers), an officer ordered Stewart and his interpreter, Juan Espinosa, out of their vehicle. After Stewart presented his official press credentials, he was taken a few feet away and forced to lie face down on the ground. The officer put his rifle to the back of Stewart's head and fired. Then Espinosa was killed as well. The video was aired on all the major U.S. networks and around the world. It had a clear impact on the United States government's decision to openly turn against Somoza. The soldiers undoubtedly knew that Stewart was an American. Perhaps he was shot because the regime was collapsing, and the soldiers were tired, angry, and badly led, or perhaps it was because they did not appreciate (or care about) the damage the murder would inflict on government. But in all likelihood Stewart's murder was also a matter of policy.

One of the most iconic murders of a journalist was the killing of Rodolfo Walsh in Argentina. Born in 1927 of Irish descent on a farm in Rio Negro Province, Walsh studied philosophy at the University for a short time but left school to work at a wide range of odd jobs. At age eighteen he got a spot as a proofreader for a newspaper. He became a writer of detective novels but is also regarded as the father of Argentine investigative journalism. His 1957 book *Operación Masacre* probed the summary execution of Peronistas after an aborted attempt to reinstall the caudillo to power in 1956. After the Cuban revolution, Walsh became a believer in the *foquista* style of revolutionary struggle advocated by his famous countryman Che Guevara, and joined the Montoneros in 1970. On the first anniversary of the coup, March 24, 1977, Walsh published his "Open Letter from a Writer to the Military Junta," which was praised by novelist Gabriel García Márquez as "one of the jewels of universal literature." In the letter Walsh called the military out for toppling an elected government, for banning political parties, attacking labor unions, destroying industries by design (to weaken the left), freezing wages and raising prices, silencing the press, and initiating the worst wave of terror that Argentines had ever known. He attested that they had illegally detained and imprisoned thousands (putting them in concentration camps out of reach of lawyers, judges, journalists, and international observers), tortured their prisoners, and ultimately killed them. The "Triple A" death squad, he argued, was now the army, navy, and air force. The day after Walsh's open letter was published, a squad from ESMA, the Naval Mechanics School, led by Alfredo Astiz tried to kidnap him off the streets of downtown Buenos Aires. He thwarted their plan by pulling out a .22 caliber Walther PPK pistol and wounding a policeman in the group. He was killed on the spot by massive return fire. Prisoners at the ESMA later saw his bullet-riddled body, and some believe it was burned.<sup>23</sup>

Another of the most internationally recognized cases was that of Pedro Joaquin Chamorro in Nicaragua, a journalist, editor, and publisher of the family-owned *La Prensa*, the main opposition paper to challenge the Somoza regimes. Scion of the powerful Chamorro clan, grandson of one president and cousin or nephew to others, he began his career of vocal opposition as a law student protesting the government of Anastasio Somoza García, and was jailed temporarily in 1944. Soon thereafter *La Prensa* was closed down, and the Chamorros went to Mexico, where Pedro Joaquin studied journalism. The family eventually returned to Nicaragua and resumed publication of *La Prensa*, and with the death of his father in 1952, Pedro Joaquin became editor. He was repeatedly jailed, tortured, and eventually exiled. He participated in a failed rebellion against Luís Somoza Debayle in 1959, and was consequently imprisoned until 1969, when he took up the editorship of *La Prensa* once again. He continued the struggle against the last of the clan to hold power, Anastasio Somoza Debayle. Pushing for human rights and democracy, *La Prensa* was routinely censored. Chamorro wrote to Somoza in 1975 that he was waiting for his attack. In January of 1978 it finally came. Chamorro was killed in his car by concentrated shotgun fire.<sup>24</sup>

Finally, one can add other example to this hard-headed tribe, the dramatic case of Irma Flaquer in Guatemala. Flaquer was a psychologist, editor, and journalist, and the founder of Guatemala's first human rights commission (which she later disbanded in frustration). She stubbornly refused to take the hint and be silent about official connections to political repression. In her newspaper columns in *La Hora* and later in *La Nación*, she became one of the government's most high-profile critics. As an advocate for social justice and democracy she also had various connections to insurgent groups. In 1970 she survived a hand grenade attack on her car, and continued on with both her roles as public critic of the regime and a covert operative of the guerrillas. She was also beaten and shot at. Finally, on October 16, 1980, as she was driving home with her son from her grandson's birthday party (purportedly one day before she was to leave for exile in Sandinista-controlled Nicaragua), their car was boxed in by a jeep and a minivan. After firing into the car (hitting her son in the head), Flaquer's attackers dragged her into a waiting car and she was disappeared.<sup>25</sup>

It should be noted that the huge majority of journalists do not have connections to insurgent groups (though murderous regimes often assert such links). Just doing their job is enough to get them killed. Ironically, the murder of journalists tends not to be big news. Their deaths, like the leftover radiation of the Big Bang, form a constant background static.<sup>26</sup> They are regularly joined by academics, especially those who study politics

and violence. Anthropologist Myrna Mack worked with some of the 1.3 million IDPs (Internally Displaced Persons) in Guatemala in the late 1980s. She was one of the few Guatemala scholars who ventured out into the countryside (foreign researchers were not as likely to be killed and could do more fieldwork). On the evening of September 11, 1990, she was waylaid as she left her office in downtown Guatemala City and stabbed 27 times by a soldier in civilian clothes. Her murder had been ordered by Col. Juan Valencia Osorio, who worked on the presidential security detail. In Guatemala in the 1980s “more than one hundred university professors and researchers were murdered.” Mack once famously quipped that in the United States academics say “publish or perish,” whereas in Guatemala, “if we publish, we perish.”<sup>27</sup> Her point was valid beyond Guatemala. Hernán Henao was also an anthropologist, professor, and dean at the Universidad de Antioquia in Medellín, Colombia, who fell afoul of the wrong people. He published extensively on political violence, internally displaced people, and human rights, and was a major critic of Colombian political repression. After various death threats, he declared the university campus a “territorio de paz” (territory of peace). On May 4, 1999, two men and a woman pulled him out of a meeting, took him to a nearby room, and shot him. He was the seventh professor from the Universidad de Antioquia to be killed in ten years.<sup>28</sup> And there was nothing new about this phenomenon. Basque nationalist and veteran of the Spanish Civil war Jesús de Galíndez fled to the Dominican Republic in 1939. He eventually became a Trujillo critic and had to flee, once again, in 1946, to New York City. There he became a graduate student and faculty member in political science at Columbia University. He wrote a dissertation on Trujillo that was critical of his regime, with “sober and damning analysis,” entitled “The Era of Trujillo.” He also penned a well-known and humorous depiction of his years in the DR. On March 12, 1956, he was snatched off a subway platform, flown to the DR in a private plane, and reportedly tortured and murdered.<sup>29</sup>

As the Galíndez case made clear, it can be dangerous to make jokes, because the murderous elites are not known for their sense of humor. Another example was that of Jaime Garzón, a Colombian journalist, politician, and comedian whose forte was political satire. After a stint as the appointed mayor of Sumapaz (a small rural settlement connected to Bogotá), and a period of work for the Gaviria administration, Garzón began a career as a television political satirist. He was especially known for his show “Quac El Noticero” between 1995 and 1997. His characters were popular and immediately recognizable throughout Colombia. In 1998 he negotiated for the release of FARC kidnapping victims, and his success raised suspicions in certain circles. General Jorge Enrique Mora Rangel called for an investigation,

and even accused Garzón of collaboration with the guerrillas. On August 13, 1999, Garzón was gunned down in front of his studio by a pair of assassins on a motorcycle (a classic Colombian method). Investigators later concluded that the hit was ordered by paramilitary leader Carlos Castaño.<sup>30</sup>

### CHURCH MEN AND WOMEN

Church hierarchies in Latin America have been known to support the status quo and give comfort to ruling elites. Yet there have also been dissenting voices from within the Catholic Church, and these tend to be dealt with according to the general pattern.

The most famous case by far was that of Archbishop Oscar Romero in El Salvador, to whom the faithful there now often refer to as “San Romero.” Romero served as a parish priest from the mid-1940s until 1966, when he was appointed as Rector to the inter-diocese seminary of San Salvador. He also became editor of the archdiocesan publication *Orientación*, and betrayed a clear conservative bent, seemingly at odds with the emerging “Liberation Theology” of the leftist priests of Latin America. It was thus understandable that his elevation to Archbishop of San Salvador in 1977 would be less than welcome to such churchmen. Yet his consciousness was ripe for raising. After the murder of his friend, left-leaning Jesuit Rutilio Grande, Romero decided that he would “have to walk the same path.” Archbishop Romero began denouncing poverty and social injustice, as well as political murder, bringing him international notoriety. He also chided the United States for its role. Predictably, on March 24, 1980, the day after he delivered a sermon calling on members of the Salvadoran defense forces to act like Christians and cease carrying out repressive and murderous orders, he was himself murdered as he celebrated mass at a hospital chapel. At his funeral a week later, which brought out two hundred fifty thousand mourners and protesters, gunmen firing from government buildings (including the presidential palace) caused panic, and killed between thirty to fifty people.<sup>31</sup>

Romero was not the last high churchman to be killed. Cardinal Juan Jesús Posadas Ocampo, archbishop of Guadalajara, was murdered on May 24, 1993, in the parking lot of the Guadalajara International airport. Seated in his car, he was shot fourteen times. A hastily convened investigation by the PRI government concluded unconvincingly that Posadas Ocampo was “mistaken” for a drug lord in a firefight between opposing cocaine gangs. When the PRI’s decades-long hold on power was broken by Vicente Fox in 2000, he immediately moved to reopen several prominent murder cases, including that of Posadas Ocampo, which had been plagued by the disap-

pearance of documents, police interference, and death threats to prosecutors. The new investigation ruled out the drug shoot-out version of the story and proposed a new theory—that members of the Carlos Salinas administration had the Cardinal killed because of information he had uncovered regarding government links to drugs and prostitution.<sup>32</sup> And in Guatemala, Bishop Juan Gerardi was known for his work with indigenous communities. During the 1970s he pushed for government recognition of Mayan languages. As president of the Guatemalan Conference of Bishops, he denounced the fire and massacre at the Spanish embassy in 1980. Consequently, he traveled to Rome and was not permitted to reenter the country until 1982. In 1988 the Conference of Bishops assigned him to serve on the National Reconciliation Commission, work that helped bring about the REMHI (Recovery of Historical Memory Project), which eventually produced the report *Guatemala: Nunca Más*. The report placed the blame for most of Guatemala's political murder on the government and the army. On April 26, 1998, two days after the report's publication, Bishop Gerardi was beaten to death in the garage of his residence. Three army officers were convicted for his murder in 2008.<sup>33</sup>

There were also the posthumously famous church women from the United States who were murdered in El Salvador. These four women—the two Maryknoll sisters, Maura Clarke and Ita Ford, Ursuline sister Dorothy Kazel, and their lay missionary companion, Jean Donovan—became persons of interest to the Salvadoran Guardia Nacional because of their “subversive” work with destitute Salvadoran nationals. On December 2, 1980, Donovan and Kazel picked up Clarke and Ford from the airport as they returned from a Maryknoll conference in newly Sandinista Managua, Nicaragua. They were followed by plain-clothed guardsmen, who intercepted them as they left the airport. The women were driven to an isolated location, raped, beaten, and killed with automatic weapons. Their white van was left with its headlights and radio on, though it was set on fire later that evening.<sup>34</sup> Their deaths demonstrated that, at times, literally no one was safe. Nine years later, little had changed. During a government offensive against the FMLN at Universidad de Centro America (UCA), six prominent Jesuits were killed on November 16, 1989. These included Ignacio Ellacuría, rector of the university, and Ignacio Martín-Baro, the vice rector. They and the other priests (as well as their cook and her daughter) were murdered execution style. Though the university was in territory controlled by the government and the forces responsible wore military uniforms, the killers left a note implicating the guerrillas. It fooled no one. The Salvadoran Right had long characterized the UCA as “a hotbed of Marxist ideas,” a platform for plotting guerrilla operations, and a poisonous influence on the nation's youth.<sup>35</sup>

Finally, there is the case of nun and human rights lawyer Digna Ochoa in Mexico. A graduate of law school in Jalapa, the capital of Veracruz, Ochoa got a job in the State Attorney General's office, though she was also a sympathizer with political opposition groups. She had the misfortune to run across a "black list" of union leaders and political dissidents. She was subsequently abducted and raped by a group of men she claimed were state police officers, but there was no investigation of the incident. Traumatized, she entered a Dominican convent from 1991 through 1999. When she returned to legal work in Mexico City, she was abducted again in August 1999. Her captors drove her around in a car and threatened her, but released her. Then in October she was abducted yet again and held overnight. The Inter-American Human Rights Court recommended her for state protection, and in 2000 she left for voluntary exile in Washington, D.C., where she received Amnesty International's "Enduring Spirit" award. In March 2001, she returned to work in Mexico City, even though the government discontinued her protective detail. She began representing political dissidents and victims of human rights violations by the Mexican army in particular. When she was killed on October 19, 2001, she was defending peasant ecologists from Guerrero. She was found in her law offices, shot twice, in the left temple (she was right-handed) and in the thigh. Originally declared a homicide, government officials later ruled her death a suicide, over vocal objections from many quarters.<sup>36</sup>

### **GENERALS, DIPLOMATS, JUDGES, AND LAWYERS**

Even members of the established regime can fall prey to murderous conspiracies if they seem inclined to allow, or heaven forbid, work for change. The Chilean professional military man, Carlos Prats González, is a prime example. Graduating at the top of his class at the Chilean Military Academy, Prats was commissioned an officer in the artillery in 1935. He moved up steadily, teaching at the Academy and serving as an adjunct military attaché to the United States and as military attaché to Argentina. In 1967 Prats was given command of the III Army Division, and in 1968 was promoted to Brigade General and chief of the army staff. In 1969 he was made Division General. When coup-minded elements of the military assassinated General René Schneider, out-going president Eduardo Frei Montalva named Prats his replacement as Commander-in-Chief of the army in October 1970. Prats picked up the mantle of leadership for the "constitutionalists," as the followers of the "Schneider Doctrine" of nonpolitical interference were

known. Yet Prats went further and became a clear supporter of the Allende government, serving in his cabinet in various capacities. Thus he angered both the anti-Allende forces and the constitutionalists in the armed forces. He also lost face with the officer corps after a bizarre episode in which he fired shots at a woman's car after a traffic altercation. The "Alejandrina Cox Incident" helped generate a minor coup attempt known as the "Tanquetazo," in which a column of tanks motored up to the Presidential Palace. The final straw was the public protest in front of his house by wives of his officers. These women called Prats a coward and repudiated him for failing to restore "order" to Chile. Prats resigned as both Army Commander and as Interior Minister the next day. Prats was replaced by Augusto Pinochet (believed to be loyal to Allende) just weeks before the September 11, 1973, coup. Following the coup, Prats went with his wife into voluntary exile in Buenos Aires, and set himself up as a possible head of a restored constitutional government for Chile. On September 30, 1974, he and his wife were killed by a car bomb outside their apartment by DINA agent Michael Townley.<sup>37</sup>

Salvador Allende's trusted lieutenant Orlando Letelier became the next recipient of Pinochet's unwelcome attention. Letelier was born in Temuco, Chile, in 1932, and as a teenager was trained as a cadet at the Chilean Military Academy. But after secondary school he opted for a legal education at the Universidad de Chile, graduating in 1954. He worked until 1959 as an analyst for the copper industry. That year he joined the Chilean Socialist Party and supported Allende's unsuccessful second bid for the presidency. As an upshot, he was fired. He moved with his family to Venezuela, becoming a copper consultant. Later he became a senior economist for the Inter-American Development Bank. After Allende was elected president in 1970, he appointed Letelier as ambassador to the United States, thanks to his years working in Washington D.C. Letelier also served as Minister of Foreign Affairs, Interior, and Defense, and given his expertise, played an important role in the expropriation of the copper industry. During the 1973 coup, he was arrested as he arrived at his office in the Defense ministry. He was imprisoned for a year and tortured repeatedly. International pressure finally secured his release, granted on the condition that he left Chile. By 1975 he had moved to Washington, D.C., where he became a senior fellow at the Institute for Policy Studies and a professor at American University. Most important, after the murder of General Prats, Letelier became the best-known critic of Pinochet's regime, and even helped scuttle several loans for Chile's military government. On September 21, 1976, Letelier and his assistant Ronni Moffitt were killed by a car bomb on Sheridan Circle, also placed by the well-traveled Michael Townley.<sup>38</sup>



Lawyers who try to extend the rule of law to would-be agents of change have also been considered fair game. Many have died in Guatemala. On November 26, 1970, law professor Julio Camey Herrera was killed on the streets of Guatemala City. A member of the committee studying a reportedly corrupt mining deal the government was pushing, Camey Herrera was caught up in the state of siege and suspension of constitutional guarantees. Government forces occupied the University of San Carlos, and hours later he was dead. A similar fate befell Adolfo Mijangos López, a lawyer, congressman, and well-respected intellectual who had stood openly against Carlos Castillo Armas in 1954. Though paralyzed in an accident while he was studying in Europe in 1958, he remained a force in Guatemalan politics. On January 13, 1971, he was shot in his wheelchair on a crowded street in downtown Guatemala City while onlookers watched in horror.<sup>39</sup> In El Salvador, Roberto D'Aubisson used his infamous television show to finger Attorney General Mario Zamora Rivas (a Christian Democrat) as an operative of the guerrillas. Zamora protested and filed a libel suit but clearly underestimated the threat against him. On February 22, 1980, while Zamora was conducting a meeting with other high-level Christian Democrats in his home, masked and armed men stormed in, separated him from the rest, and shot him in a bathroom.<sup>40</sup> Likewise Rodrigo Lara Bonilla, Colombian Minister of Justice under Belisario Betancur, was assassinated on April 30, 1984, by henchmen working for Pablo Escobar. Often attributed solely to the prosecution of cocaine traffickers, Lara Bonilla's murder was also driven by Betancur's ill-fated attempt to negotiate with the Colombian guerrillas.<sup>41</sup> In Honduras, the extrajudicial execution of "well-known attorney" Gerardo Salinas took place in front of his office in Tegucigalpa on June 6, 1980. Salinas was representing three Hondurans accused of purchasing weapons for the Salvadoran guerrillas.<sup>42</sup> In Peru, Manuel Febres Flores worked for the AAD (the Association of Democratic Lawyers), an organization that defended people accused of terrorist acts. Many supporters of Peru's paramilitary forces believed that the AAD was the "legal arm" of the guerrillas. Febres Flores was murdered by paramilitaries on July 28, 1988.<sup>43</sup>

### **HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVISTS, LABOR AND COMMUNITY LEADERS, STUDENTS**

Dirty warriors take a special interest in groups that resist their program with collective forms of mobilization, whether through human rights activism, community groups, or labor organizing.

The modern incarnation of Latin American human rights activism was born in Buenos Aires's Plaza de Mayo, in front of the Casa Rosada, the seat of Argentina's executive branch. It was there that a group of mothers and grandmothers of the disappeared began their weekly protests on April 30, 1977. They wore white head scarves to symbolize the baby shawls of their missing children. Though initially viewing the Madres de Plaza de Mayo as an annoyance, the junta began to target them in late 1977, a few months after they emerged. Alfredo Astiz, a young and handsome naval officer (known later as the "blond angel of death") befriended and infiltrated Las Madres, posing as "Gustavo Niño," the supposed brother of a disappeared boy. (Astiz, who had led the team attempting to abduct Rodolfo Walsh, was also infamously responsible for the shooting of Dagmar Hagelin, a seventeen-year-old Swedish-Argentine girl). It was Astiz who selected The Madres' Vice President, Azucena Villaflor de Vicenti for abduction, scooped up in front of her home as she went to buy a newspaper. Two of the other founding members of the Madres, Maria Ponce de Bianco and Esther Balistrina de Creaga, were violently kidnapped from a meeting at the Santa Cruz church in the San Cristobál neighborhood of Buenos Aires, along with French nuns Sister Alicia Doman and Sister Léonie Dunquet and several of the Madres rank and file.<sup>44</sup> We can also mention another famous Argentine case, that of Augusto Vandor, the Peronista union leader. Perón doubted his loyalty (Vandor had pushed for Peronismo without Perón) and reportedly engineered his murder by the Peronist left.<sup>45</sup>

Guatemalan elites have also demonstrated a savage bent toward such activist groups over the years. Rogelia Cruz Martínez (a former Miss Guatemala) was murdered in 1968 for her left-wing political views. Her case was not helped by the fact that she was also the girlfriend of labor leader Leonardo Costillo Johnson.<sup>46</sup> By the end of 1972, most of the leaders of the Partido Guatemalteco del Trabajo (PGT) had been captured and killed. Later, in October 1978, the Ejercito Secreto Anticomunista (the Secret Anti-Communist Army), or ESA, a death squad with clear government ties, published a list of 38 opposition leaders it had marked for death. At the top of the list was Oliverio Castañeda de León, Secretary General of the University Student Association, who was gunned down after speaking at a rally, in sight of dozens of passively on-looking police. This was a signature killing, and demonstrative of the impunity with which the forces of the status quo could eliminate critics. Added to the list in 1979 were the assassinations of high-profile opposition politicians Alberto Fuentes Mohr and Manuel Argueta. By 1984, new human rights organizations began to replace the ones wiped out in the repressions of the 1970s, and these became targets

of a new wave of death squad activity. Also targeted, predictably, were labor leaders and student activists. The Grupo de Apoyo Mutuo (Mutual Support Group), or GAM, a support group for the families of the disappeared established in 1984, saw its public relations director, Héctor Gómez Calito, and another “outspoken leader,” María Rosario Godoy de Cuevas, both tortured and murdered. He was snatched from a bus stop in March 1985; she was kidnapped in April, along with her younger brother and two-year-old son. Their mutilated bodies were later identified.<sup>47</sup>

In Mexico, guerrilla, political activist, and labor organizer Rubén Jaramillo was assassinated in 1962, after many prior attempts on his life. Jaramillo had been a leader in Zapata’s “Army of the South” and in the 1940s was involved in labor activism. He had organized a party, the Partido Agrario Obrero Morelense (Agrarian Labor Party of Morelos), or PAOM, and in 1943 launched a new guerrilla movement in Morelos. He was amnestied in 1944, and after he founded PAOM, ran for governor, claiming that victory had been stolen in 1945. In 1946 his followers were tortured and murdered, many believed by state Judicial Police and thugs paid by the sugar barons. He then renewed his insurgency, which lasted for years. In 1958 he took another amnesty, and in early 1960s was once again leading rural workers in land occupations. On May 23, 1962, his home was surrounded by federal troops and Judicial Police, and he and his family were taken prisoner. Later their bodies, filled with bullets, were dumped on a road near Xochicleo.<sup>48</sup>

In the Dominican Republic, the Mirabal sisters, known as Las Mariposas, were perhaps the most famous dissidents to defy Trujillo. Patricia Mercedes, Minerva, Maria Teresa, and Debé were products of the Dominican social and economic upper crust. Cultured, educated, married to other prominent citizens, they still expressed intense opposition to Trujillo’s regime. Minerva received a law degree but was not permitted to practice after she spurned Trujillo’s creepy romantic advances. She led the charge but was soon followed by her sisters. They formed a group known as the “Fourteenth of June Movement.” Minerva’s code name was “butterfly.” She and Maria Teresa were repeatedly jailed and tortured. Three of the Mirabals’ husbands were also locked up in an unsuccessful attempt to silence the sisters. On November 25, 1960, as they returned from a visit with their husbands in prison, they were stopped by Trujillo’s henchmen, taken to a cane field (the traditional location in the DR for such things) and savagely beaten and strangled.<sup>49</sup>

Themes get repeated, and the killing can be rather extensive, as the murder of local leaders and union organizers in Colombia demonstrated. A very partial but representative list of those murdered or disappeared between

2000 and 2004 included presidents of the community action committees, presidents of peasant associations, leaders of “peace” communities, union leaders, the founder of a human rights group devoted to the families of the disappeared, and the leader of a black and indigenous women’s group.<sup>50</sup>

### MASS SLAUGHTERS

Many victims, though part of a targeted group, were killed individually, and their numbers do add up. The emotional weight of collective killing, however, can be overwhelming in comparison. Mass slaughters can be localized and quick, or spread over entire countries for years at a time. They represent the shift toward attacking the message of change through the murder of its possible audience. They express the ultimate logic of repression and dirty war in all its varieties. This killing is less focused and more indiscriminate, but no less politically motivated. Whether the victims are urban leftists in Argentina, Uruguay, or Chile, Mayan villagers in Guatemala, Communist party members or sympathizers in El Salvador, Colombian militants of Liberal and leftist movements, or potential peasant supporters of guerrilla bands, the underlying concept remains the same: people with alternative ideas about society who are considered threats to the social, economic, and political status quo must be eliminated.

Elimination is often aimed at entire political movements. In Colombia this happened first on a massive scale with the Gaitanistas in the 1940s and 1950s. History repeated itself on a smaller scale with the destruction of the UP in the 1980s and 1990s. Fidel Castaño, cocaine business associate of Pablo Escobar, invested heavily in cattle and land. He became a para leader around 1987, and “armed his own private army” to carry out “dirty war” against the UP, the political “unarmed branch of subversion.” A “scorched earth” campaign treated leaders, activists, and leftist fellow travelers as supporters of subversion—the Castaños assumed all had “automatic and direct connection” to the guerrillas.<sup>51</sup>

Whole ethnic groups could be targeted, such as the Maya in Guatemala, with entire villages wiped out. In Guatemala, the overall numbers of victims seem more akin to those of African genocides. A representative example is the May 1978 massacre in Panzós, Alta Verapaz. In the 1970s there had been significant economic change in the area of Panzós. Campesinos were being pushed off their land to facilitate mining and increased cattle production, both of which led to land concentration. Campesinos organized to get titles to their land, and elite landowners retaliated. On May 29, seven-