



Mariana Hernández León

## Daily Life

Magali Tercero

## Innocent Victims

Four years ago, a pregnant woman lost her life in a stationary store. She was hit by a stray bullet. These kinds of things began to happen frequently in Sinaloa.

*Vox populi*

## Hit the Floor!

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They killed a teacher at the door of her home while she was saying goodbye to a friend who had visited her, all because they were killing a *narco* in a car-to-car shooting near her house. When her friend screamed: “Hit the floor, they’re shooting!” she dropped, but they had already shot her.

*Javier Valdez, journalist*

## **They are Good to You**

“If you don’t get involved in their business nothing happens to you, they are good to you.”

*A cook, a chauffer, and a maid who didn’t allow soldiers to search their bosses’ house while they were not home, a nurse and three taxi drivers who were interviewed for this book*

## **In My Father’s Name**

“She’s Leyzaola’s granddaughter,” the girl explained. “You mean Leyzaola la Onza? What is a granddaughter of Leyzaola doing in Mexico City? What are you doing here in Culiacán? My grandfather told me how they assassinated your grandfather. He knew him,” her friend responded in an excited voice that seemed to me very strange.

## **For My Son**

The majority of us in Culiacán have a neighbor or a family member who has been a victim of the shootings or who has walked down the wrong path. The loss of innocent victims hurts the most.

*Alma Trinidad Herrera*

## **Do you see any *narcos*?**

Before, you could go anywhere, anywhere at all, and you didn’t think twice before going out to eat, dance, or whatever, to have a good time... But in these times you think: “Is it dangerous? Have there been shootouts, kidnappings? Do you see armed *narcos*?” This is no life and I don’t put on airs of purity, but something must be done for the next generation, friends. We are already a lost cause...

*Eduardo Parra, writer (excerpt from his blog)*

## **The Happy Hour**

My daughter said to me: “When happy hour begins, I’m going in the bathroom.” That’s what she calls the shootouts: “the happy hour.” “Why the bathroom?” I asked. “Because it’s the

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safest place.” I tell my kids all the time: “Don’t peek out at the street. Don’t open the curtain of the window to the street. Get down on the floor. Don’t crawl. Drag yourself like a reptile. Run to the rooms farthest from the street. Protect yourself, call the police.” We are training them for war. It’s like training for the end of the world. It is our legacy.

Ernesto Diezmartínez, academic and film critic

## **Indigenous Race Mixed with White**

An aunt of mine who lives in Mexico City, but was born in Culiacán, showed me her birth certificate. It shows her year of birth as 1928, the names of her parents, and an unexpected fact: “Race: Indigenous mixed with white.” A vestige of the colonial castes? Someone explains to me that race is no longer officially registered. The scant presence of indigenous people could be a source of pride: “The race came out very good here because there is no indigenous blood,” an upper-middle class lady said. She reminds me of an old relative for whom whiteness was half of beauty, a deep-rooted idea in 1930s Culiacán.

## **Heat Wave**

Are you coming to Culiacán? You will see that you can’t even walk the streets. It’s a very bad time. A few days ago we hit 104° F.

*A family acquaintance*

## **First-Degree Murder of a Loved One**

I am in the middle of a work trip, involuntarily contaminated by a personal exploration of my mother’s homeland she is a Sinaloan like so many others, overwhelmed by her father’s assassination, as I wrote elsewhere. It is only now that I viscerally feel the embarrassing reality of a Culiacán full of relatives grieving over the intentional homicide of a loved one. From time to time the words of Alma Trinidad Herrera assault me: “He died like a vile delinquent.” During the first few months she was repeating the names of the murderers of her 16-year-old son Cristóbal, but she was soon advised to be prudent.

## **2008 Makes Us Realize**

We talk about this so much because it is a necessity for society. As in psychoanalysis, 2008 makes us realize. We knew the narco existed. There are now more shootouts in broad daylight, with dozens of innocent victims. This shows that the law has failed, and there are people who end up taking justice into their own hands.

*Journalist*

## Father Murdered, Hit Man Got Away

Here, psychologists and therapists are alarmed by the repercussions of an accelerated decomposition of society. “Father murdered, hit man got away,” seems to be the equation. Nevertheless, I have lived the other Culiacán and I have enjoyed much of that world of happy and friendly people, resistant and very capable of survival, as Gilberto López Alanís said in an interview during my first *culichi* morning. And not only are there the innocent victims of shootouts mentioned in *Noroeste* and other newspapers during 2008, but also orphans, widows, parents of murdered children. You also have to consider the descendents of those violently killed in some moment of Sinaloa’s history, they are also victims of the historical violence in their state. “You have to pay attention,” Cuamea tells me with that indignation that flares up when you least expect it: “You have to notice how we settle our problems here. Ever since I can remember, we do it by blows. I get furious that Culiacán is seen as the “curious Sinaloa” depicted in the reports coming out of Mexico City.”

## Living Memory

“This book about the elder Alfonso Leyzaola is painful for many in Culiacán. Memory is always alive here,” stated a man in the audience at the presentation of the book, *En nombre de mi padre*, by Margarita Leyzaola (1929-1977).

## Sinaloa: Narco Laboratory

“Sinaloa is a laboratory of what occurs in Mexico. What we are seeing in many states of the country already happened here 30 years ago. The narco is in the entire territory,” Francisco Cuamea tells me in Café Miró—a refuge of intellectuals—of the suburb Chapultepec, commonly known as “*la Chapule*,” located a few steps from the Botanical Gardens of Culiacán. Recalling that this paradise (seriously, Sinaloa’s nature is like paradise) was the stage for the police chase of a man hired to assassinate a professor of the Autonomous University of Sinaloa (UAS), I see that the image of this state as a laboratory for the social decomposition unfolding in Mexico influenced my decision to come to its capital city: hearing stories of people from the Sierra being left without “bosses” or “work” since the drug war began in Culiacán that come down to the city to assault the population; imagining the young traffickers—“buchones” as they are called, for showing off like *nouveau riche* with their Buchanan’s whisky—killing any citizen who crosses the path of their Hummers with raised rims; my feelings at seeing the luxury SUVs that make 75% of car sales in the city, which has the most car owners in Mexico with 3 or 4 cars per family. Here and there I have heard of that handsome Venezuelan who seduced and decapitated a known drug criminal’s wife. I heard about how her husband received the head in a box. Here and there they mention a mysterious luxury truck that chases drivers as part of a bet between “buchones.” If you don’t stop, they kill you. They said to one driver: “You can go, I bet that you would stop.”

## Social Bandits?

The British historian Eric Hobsbawm created the category of social bandits in his classic work, *Bandits* (1965), in which he studied popular forms of resistance. He included mafias as an expression of primitive forms of protest typical of rebels like Robin Hood (or Chucho el Roto and Jesus Malverde). In that work he refers to rural areas that experience the transition from an archaic agrarian society to agrarian capitalism. In Sinaloa we would be talking about a peasant from the sierra being converted into an urbanized drug trafficker, or “buchon.” According to the author, as the modern State loses its capacity to control, the resurgence of social bandits in the third millennium becomes feasible. Sinaloa shows that he fell short.

## Criminals in Search of Happiness?

One of the interviewees would refer to the power of primitive rebels and their social rebellion as being transformed into a power like that of the mafia. Do the criminals that Brazilian artist Helio Oiticica defined, in 70s-style romanticism, as criminals “in desperate search of authentic happiness” exist? The problem with marijuana growers—“proud to be marijuana growers” someone said—now transformed into international drug traffickers is that, sheltered by money invested in the authorities’ payroll, they have paved the way for a fact that is now more visible than ever: innocent victims.

## Horse Face

Helio Oiticica once wrote: “I wanted to pay homage here to what I see as individual social rebellion: the one we call ‘*bandido*.’” That kind of thinking is dangerous but very necessary for me: There is a contradiction, an ambivalent character, in the behavior of the marginal man: a great sensitivity underlies a violent character, and many times, a crime is generally a sort of desperate search for happiness. I met Horse Face personally and I can say that he was my friend, but to society he was public enemy number one, wanted for audacious crimes and robberies. What I found perplexing then was the contrast between what I knew of him as a friend, as someone with whom I spoke in the context of everyday life, like I would do with any other person, and the image created by society, or the way his behavior unfolds before society. This homage is an archaic attitude confronting any type of armed force: police, army, etc. In fact, the protest poems (in *Capas y Cajas*) have more social meaning [...]. Horse Face reflects an important ethical moment, which is decisive for me, since it reflects an individual revolt against every type of social conditioning. In other words: violence is justified as revolt but never as oppression.

## Perversion

Violence has perverted Sinaloan society.

## Narco-insurgence?

A report by the United States army issued an alert about the growth of paramilitary groups in Mexico, some of which are used by the drug cartels to dominate territories and challenge the state, in addition to situating themselves as part of “the third generation of crime.” The report from the Institute of Strategic Studies of the Army War College of the Pentagon, titled *Narco-insurgency in Mexico and U.S. Anti-drug Policy*, maintains that the government of Barack Obama needs to modify its anti-drug trafficking strategy and shift to counterinsurgency. “We are observing a transition from the traditional gangster tactics of hired assassins, to paramilitary terrorism with guerilla tactics,” it warns.

El Universal, July 5, 2009

## Conspicuous, Extravagant

In the 1980s, I would go to narcos’ parties after hitting the bars. It was a typically thing to do. Their houses were “conspicuous,” very extravagant. Everyone in Culiacán knew who they were coexisting with but they didn’t get involved. They danced. There were lots of drugs. They did their own thing. The mothers of that generation now ask themselves how to educate their twenty-something daughters. Information reaches them from all sorts of places. “That’s enough, right?” a 43 year-old professional tells me.

## Precision

Precision: “Information is not formation.”

## I Sent My Daughters to Canada

Young women contact each other to get together with narcos because they hope to snatch a narco who will leave them money. As young people ironically say, “Everyone knows who they are, where they are, except the government.” I resist accepting that this is already part of everyday life. We are learning to live with fear. I have to go out, I have to go to work, to run errands. I have to take responsibility for myself. In Culiacán they don’t mug you but there could be a confrontation, a roadblock. My daughter doesn’t live here. I sent her to Canada because we mothers want to avoid narcos falling in love with them. I have said this to people and they say: “Either you don’t let them go out, or you give them your blessing and trust their safety to all possible saints, because who knows if they will come home.” A mother told me: “I only tell them that it’s all right, that things are bad and they would know what to do.” Knowing that we are exposed, I could still go out and not come back, the same with my son or daughter. I don’t



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know who they get together with once they leave my house. I know lots of her friends but not all of them. She has to make her own decisions. The situation is very clear. Sure, there are other parents who are more permissive – good or bad – it's not up to me to judge, but it has to do with the family relationship, because some parents sure are surprised when their kids turn up imprisoned or dead.

*A mother and housewife*

## **Let's Go to the Caliente**

A 47 year-old woman invites me to play at the casino Caliente, so that I can see with my own eyes, "the disgrace of having these establishments here," where 90% of the clients are women who become addicted to the machines full of lights and infantile music meant to create the illusion of having obtained something grandiose. It's full of women. There are some men and it's almost midnight. "Many are addicted to the game. It's their entertainment. What a shame that this came to Culiacán, but they need a casino because money is laundered there. If not why else?"

## **Burdened**

This lady, who wishes to remain anonymous, and whose daughters appear in the society pages all the time, told me one night: "I belong to a burdened family. The death of my grandfather is an injustice that no one got over, nor his death under torture. It's something that impeded many members of the family from doing many things in life. What's certain is that when someone speaks badly of him in my presence, I stop them. Women from here are very different than those from the South. We are very stubborn." MV makes it very clear: the memory of spilled blood gets transferred from generation to generation. When the grandchildren of two old rivals, who may have already died, meet each other, these sick emotions arise once again.

## **How He Trembled**

How many sudden silences: like the one that afternoon of the barbeque in one of those gated communities. Everyone was silent while listening to a thirty-something professional as he began to recollect, very excitedly, a conversation he overheard at the Culiacán airport. "They were five soldiers, between 22 and 30 years old. They were standing in front of the security area. They laughed a lot. They said, 'How he trembled. I jerked him.' They were talking about how they tortured and killed someone. They talked calmly, like when I talk with my friends about a drinking binge. A subculture is dominating Culiacán. There's no way out."

## **Keep Quiet or Die**

An interviewee who identifies himself simply as Juan explains: "Here you see and keep

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quiet or you die. You can't govern any other way. These are very hard times. The problem is very serious. Before drug trafficking was kept under control because governments negotiated, but not now. You see the killing of a family in 2007; the soldiers were drugged on weed and cocaine, at least that's what we deduced, because they attacked the family in their house, just like that. It was widely reported. There was no punishment, of course. It's well known about soldiers: they take them away in that uniform of theirs, they suspend them for a while, and then bring them back. Who would recognize them? They also killed another family who was riding in a Hummer. They said it was in self-defense, but it wasn't: all the bullets came from behind. When the economy falters, it gets very bad. They have bought *ejidos* here, shrimp cargo ships to transport drugs, automotive industries. The economy is already very infiltrated here."

## **Mother's Day and the Empty City**

It was my birthday when they killed Chapo's son. The next day the city was empty. It was May 10<sup>th</sup> and no one went out. I don't know what's going on with the president. The first thing he should have fixed is unemployment. The economy is the priority, not the violence. He has created only more violence. We have many seasons of much fear. The economy is fully controlled, and if the drug traffickers leave it's the end of consumer spending.

*Mother and housewife, aged 50*

## **In Cash**

It doesn't matter if they pay me in cash for the apartments and houses I sell. I have to make a living somehow. Narcos are very good people if you don't get in their way.

*Man, age 38, literature and film aficionado*

## **I Know I am Going to Launder Money**

When I finish college I know I am going to launder money, even without knowing it. It's part of life here.

*College student, 24, just returning from studying in Canada*

## **There Are Beggars Already**

They tell me there are no beggars, but the November 6, 2009 *Noroeste* ran a story headlined: "Indigents scattered, without space or care." It was a report on the Mother Teresa Center. What is certain is that Culiacán, and this reporter verified it after several visits, stands out as a booming city where you rarely see a beggar. "How is it possible that in these macroeconomic



conditions you can visit Culiacán and see some places that seem like you are walking down a Miami boulevard?”

## The Narco is Not Hiring

The musicians held a sit-in last year to protest that there was no work, complaining that *narcos* no longer hired them. It touched me.

*Anonymous*

## Cosmopolitan City

When two branches of Starbucks opened in August 2009, the newly appointed manager, Gerardo Rojas Blázquez, declared: “This is an important, cosmopolitan city of demanding consumers. It has all the potential to have many stores.” And it looks like it’s true, because, as a recently-graduated economist notes: “Besides the legal fortunes of traditional families who did not get involved in poppies in the 1940s, there is plenty of drug money.”

*Translated by Margot Olavarría*

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**Magali Tercero** is a *cronista* and a cultural journalist. She won the Fernando Benítez National Cultural Journalism Prize in 2010 for *Culiacán, el lugar equivocado* [*Culiacán, the wrong place*]. She wrote *Cien freeways: DF y sus alrededores* [*A hundred freeways: DF and its surroundings*], *San Judas Tadeo, santería y narcotráfico* [*San Judas Tadeo, Santería and Narco-trafficking*] and co-authored *Frida Kahlo. Una mirada crítica*. [*Frida Kahlo. A Critical Appraisal*] with Teresa del Conde. The Inter-American Press Association in Miami granted her the Prize for Journalistic Excellence in 2007 in the *crónica* category. She also earned the Premio Nacional de Crónica Urbana Manuel Gutiérrez Nájera, granted by the UACM in 2005. Her work has been included in Carlos Monsiváis’s anthology *A ustedes les consta. Antología de la crónica en México*, and Antonio Aboritt’s anthology *The Best Mexican Essays of 2005*. She was a member of the National System for Art Curators (SNCA) in the 2007-2010 period. She writes columns for *Milenio Diario* and collaborates with *Letras Libres*, *La Tempestad*, and *Cultura Urbana* among other publications.