

Narco-Terror Has Come to Mexico City

By Greg Grandin

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Journalists and activists hold up cut-out images of slain photojournalist Ruben Espinosa during a protest on Sunday, Aug. 2, 2015. (AP Photo/Dario Lopez-Mills)

On July 31, Rubén Espinosa, a prominent Mexican photojournalist who covered social movements, and Nadia Vera Pérez, a 32-year-old activist, along with three other people—Yesenia Quiroz, an 18-year-old student from Mexicali, and two other unnamed women, one from Colombia—were murdered in a Mexico City apartment earlier this week. All were tortured. The women were raped.

Espinosa, who worked for the magazines *Proceso* and *Cuartoscuro*, is the latest of (at least) eighty-six “journalists and media workers” murdered “in definite or probable connection with their work” since 2000—the forty-second since 2010. Fourteen of those journalists killed were from the state of Veracruz, where Espinosa had worked until he left for Mexico City, fearing for his life. Nadia Vera Pérez was a social anthropologist and active in the student movement #YoSoy132 in Veracruz. Both had had run-ins with the state’s corrupt governor, Javier Duarte, of the ruling PRI party. According to the *Los Angeles Times*, “Duarte’s administration has been the deadliest for journalists in the history of the state.”

In Espinosa’s last interview before his murder, he explained why he had to leave Veracruz: “I had to leave because it was not a direct threat, but I got the message. It was just recently when students were attacked and brutally beaten with

machetes. In these situations, we can't do less with any type of aggression or intimidation because we don't know what might happen. Veracruz is a lawless state." Espinosa had taken the cover photograph of Duarte for an issue of the magazine *Proceso*, with the headline, "Veracruz: A State without Law."

Nadia Vera Pérez said, in an interview just weeks before her murder, of Veracruz's governor: "Give an ignorant man a little bit of power and see what happens.... How many journalists have been murdered, and what has come of it? How many students, activists, and human rights defenders have been killed, picked up, or disappeared? We have an unbelievable number of missing persons in Mexico, and it has everything to do with the person who is governing the state." She indicated in that interview that, were something to happen to her, Governor Duarte would be to blame. Seven journalists have been killed this year alone. Four of them worked in Veracruz.

Until now, Mexico City has been something of a sanctuary for political activists, who enjoyed a presumed sense of protection in the cosmopolitan capital. That's now over. "Narco-political terror, with multiple signs of state complicity, has come to Mexico City. This is a new development," says Camilo Pérez Bustillo, who is teaching in the Departments of Government and Criminal Justice at New Mexico State University in Las Cruces.

Mexico, of course, is a close ally of the United States, and the recipient of evermore billions of dollars in aid. It might be an inconvenience if it was revealed that money went to security forces complicit in these kinds of murders. So the Mexican government has become very skilled at quickly "closing" its atrocities. The disappearance of the forty-three students last September has been "solved" a number of times now (though the relatives of the students disagree).

In the case of Rubén Espinosa and Nadia Vera Pérez, and the other victims, state officials have responded with remarkable competence and alacrity: Nearly immediately after the bodies were found, Mexico City's chief prosecutor, Rodolfo Ríos Garza, said that Espinosa left Veracruz and came to the capital because he was out of work and was looking for a job—not because he was in fear for his life. The prosecutor also said that he thought that the murder scene—with all the victims tied up, tortured, and killed with a bullet to the head—looked like a "robbery." Within days, investigators matched fingerprints in the apartment through a criminal database. Then prosecutors, according to *The Guardian*, "released video from a street security camera showing three suspects leaving Vera's apartment less than an hour after" Espinosa's last electronic message.

The investigation has been as efficient as the crime, apparently. According to the timestamp on the video, *The Guardian* writes, "If the men caught on camera are the attackers, it means they tortured, bound, raped, killed and packed a suitcase full of stolen items in less than 50 minutes." The video shows all three men acting "calmly." "All three walk normally," and one of them, who got into a car, "takes his time pulling out."

Two days ago, chief prosecutor Rodolfo Ríos Garza said he would call on Governor Duarte to give testimony, “if necessary.” But just a few hours ago, his office announced the arrest of an unnamed suspect—one of the men on the video tape—on Twitter. He has, according to Ríos, “a lengthy and violent criminal record.” Very convenient.