



## INTRODUCTORY INFORMATION

In these trying times, when police reports have moved from the back pages to become front page news, it is urgent to consider and think about violence in this country. This visual chronicle of the history of yellow press in Mexico aims to contribute to the discussion.

The yellow press –also known as yellow journalism– is a type of journalistic genre focused on covering bloody events. The raw materials for this scandalous press coverage are accidents, murders, robberies, lynch mobs, rapes, torture, assaults and other violent occurrences that trouble daily life.

During the 19th century, the yellow press occupied an important place in the Mexican newspaper hierarchy. The red book compiled by Vicente Riva Palacio, based on historical violent happenings, is considered a classic within the national bibliography of that century. During the Porfirio Díaz's regime, engravers Manuel Alfonso Manilla and José Guadalupe Posada illustrated dozens of broadsides with news items and corridos that spoke about bandits, criminals and firing squads. During the 20th century, important writers such as Víctor Ronquillo and Rolo Díaz worked for years in the police beat; likewise, some of Mexico's greatest photographers built their career working in that section, and important adherents such as photojournalists Pedro Valtierra and Fernando Brito, and visual reporters from La Jornada newspaper Alfredo Domínguez, Marco Peláez, Leo Espinoza, Carlos Cisneros, Jesús Villaseca, among many others.

The stories collected by this journalistic genre crisscross the nation's history and include heart-wrenching episodes, from the murder of the Dongo family in 1789, to the San Fernando migrant massacre at San Fernando, Tamaulipas in 2010; from the Gray Car Gang to organized crime; from Maximilian I of Mexico's execution by firing squad at the Cerro de las Campanas in 1867 to the murder of Luis Donaldo Colosio at Lomas Taurinas, Tijuana in 1994.

Carlos Monsiváis studied this and wrote in his book *Los mil y un velorios*:

Alarmed and pleased, the crowds stop as in front of a shopfront; there, at arms length, rivers of blood, betrayals, iniquities, perversions, robberies.

[..]

In Latin America, the yellow press took hold of its devotees by shining a light on details of their daily life, with a sensationalist slant: disappearances, jails, frauds, repossessions, stabbings, fights, murder just for the sake of murder, just because, because it seemed the thing to do, not to be taken for a fool, because violence is an understandable language. The press, however, through their posturings that fail to hide their enthusiasm, promote those behaviors...

At the beginning of the 21st century, in Mexico, this genre is more present than ever. In 2010, the writer explains the phenomenon like this:

In 15 years, the main thing that has changed is the terrible emergency, at times militarized, brought by drug trafficking, that has radically altered the yellow press and has moved it almost daily to the shrine of the front page. The singularity of murders and murderers has disappeared, and crime's widespread growth also means a massive dehumanization.

The Estanquillo Museum's collection houses numerous publications, engravings, models, photographs, broadsides and memorabilia pertaining to the yellow press, as well as a number of photographs from the Metinides epoch that some researchers thought to be lost. This exhibition has been culled from the archives of Pedro Barrios and other collectors, friends of the museum, as well as from the work of contemporary artists.



From the murder of the Dongo Family/The legend of the Dongo family

“In October 1790 the bodies of don Joaquín Dongo, a wealthy merchant, and 10 family members and employees were found with their skulls bashed in. The motive: the robbery of 22 thousand pesos. Days later, the three guilty persons are hanged. This will be the prime occurrence of the ‘yellow press’ during the Colonial era because of the viciousness and the intrusion of crime in the sphere of respectability”.

Carlos Monsiváis



The execution of Maxilimian of Habsburg

On July 14, 1790, following a summary trial, the prince Maximilian of Habsburg was condemned by a military tribunal to die for crimes against nation, order and public peace. Five days later he was executed by firing squad at the Cerro de las Campanas in Querétaro. That execution marked the end of a bloody struggle between liberals and conservatives during the French intervention and the Second Empire in Mexico. The news shocked the world. The court’s photographer, François Aubert, took plates of the firing squad, the place of execution and the body of the Emperor, of his bloody shirt and jacket, and even made some photomontages of the event. These pieces were reprinted massively.

Rafael Barajas, *el Fisgón*



Street gazettes

“Engraver José Guadalupe Posada (1868-1913) turns the most notorious crimes into an artistic expression and perceives in the bloody happenings the fairy tales of the crowd”.

“*The heinous crime of the heinous son who killed his heinous mother* or A woman that splits in two halves and becomes a fireball. In Street Gazettes, Posada transforms facts of social nature in ‘sensations’, in that which is ‘so real’ that is unbelievable, so close that only when art or scandal transform it one can perceive its definitive remoteness”.

Carlos Monsiváis





The Gray Car Gang

“The most famous criminal episode in Mexico City after the Revolution, The Gray Car Gang (1915), is fascinating for reasons that include the joy in the name given by the crowd and its ties with the “Other” in the Mexican Revolution, where soldiers who, without contradiction, represent the law and sponsor criminals [...] With Carranza’s rule, criminals return dressed in military garb and the pact between some generals and the members of the Gray Car Gang who receive jewels and money in exchange for protection solidifies.”

Carlos Monsiváis



Self made widows

In the years following the Revolution, Mexico City was scandalized by several cases of women who killed their husbands. Researcher Rebeca Monroy Nasr explains that “the cases of Magdalena Jurado, Alicia Olvera, Luz González, María del Pilar Moreno and Nydia Camargo Rubín were very well known”. However, the most famous one was Maria Teresa Landa’s, Miss Mexico 1928, who killed her husband, general Vidal Corro, when she found out through the press that he had another wife. Practically all of these self made widows were exonerated by juries made up of ordinary people.



Rafael Barajas, *el Fisgón*

Álvaro Obregón/León Toral/Madre Conchita/Padre Pro

“On June 17, 1928, general Álvaro Obregon, already a reelected president, is shot to death by the illustrator [J. De León Toral] at the La Bombilla restaurant, in San Angel. Unlike the killings of Madero, Zapata, Carranza and Villa, which can only be considered political crimes, in the case of Obregón, history and yellow press collide”.

Carlos Monsiváis

“Months later, the ‘sacrifice’ of Miguel Agustín Pro inspired another catholic militant, José de León Toral, to carry out another attack, one that finally killed Álvaro Obregón on July 17, 1928”.

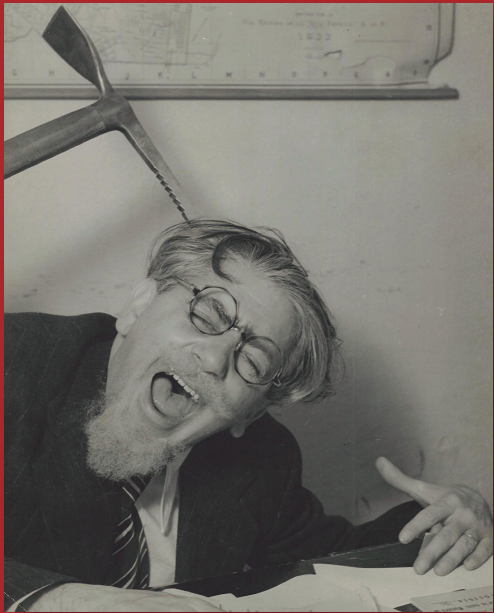
Carlos Martínez Assad/Pablo Serrano Álvarez





**The murder of León Trotsky**

“When the two men entered the studio, the thought “This mind might killed me” crossed Trotsky’s mind [...] He had just finished reading the first page when he received a terrible blow to the head. ‘I had put... my coat on a piece of furniture’, Jackson testified, ‘I pulled out the climbing axe and closing my eyes, I hit his head with all my strength’. ‘Jackson’ expected that after that powerful blow his victim would be dead without noise and that he would be able to walk out of the studio and disappear before anyone found out what had happened. Instead, the victim gave a ‘terrible and piercing scream’: ‘A scream I would remember all my life’, said the killer. With the skull bashed in and his face covered in blood, Trotsky jumped up and he threw everything he had near at his aggressor: books, ink pot, even the Dictaphone and later, himself. Everything lasted three or four minutes. The piercing and heartrending scream had alerted Natalia and the guards, but they took a few moments to realize where it had come from and they ran to the studio. For a few moments, there was a furious struggle in the studio: Trotsky’s last one.



Isaac Deutscher



**Cardinal Juan Jesús Posadas**

“In 1993, cardinal Juan Jesús Posadas Ocampo is killed in the Guadalajara airport in an ‘accidental death due to a cross fire between two drug trafficking gang’, because, in the first account given by the PGR directed by Dr. Jorge Carpizo, the Cardinal was mistaken with Joaquín *El Chapo* Guzmán. The Cardinal had been bishop in Tijuana, where, according to several versions, he was the priest who took confession to the Arellano Felix brothers’ mother.”

Carlos Monsiváis

**Luis Donaldo Colosio/José Francisco Ruiz Massieu/ Francisca Zetina Chávez, La Paca**

“In terms of drama, the two most important murders during the presidential term happen in 1994: Luis Donaldo Colosio, presidential candidate by the PRI party and José Francisco Ruiz Massieu, PRI’s director and former brother in law to Carlos and Raúl Salinas. The bullet that Mario Aburto shot at Colosio in March 23, 1994...”



Carlos Monsiváis

**Enrique Metinides**



“It is not surprising that Monsiváis felt attracted to the character and the photographs of Enrique Metinides. Both have been dedicated chroniclers of their beloved Mexico City, both lived through the era of splendor; crisis, repression, earthquakes, both natural and political, as well as the actual chaos brought about narcoparanoia. Monsiváis never stopped praising the ingenuity and the surprising optimism of the city; meanwhile, Metinides’ camera registered for more than 50 years, with his cinematic eye, its accidents, tragedies and its survival”.

Trizha Ziff





### José Ortiz Muñoz, *El Sapo*

According to his own reckoning, by the age of 45 he had already murdered more than 100 people ‘following orders from a higher being’. License to kill. In 1938, *el Sapo*, became a hunter of *cedillistas* (the follower from far right politician Saturnino Cedillo), who he exterminated at will the same way he would do later with *sinarquistas*”.

Carlos Monsiváis

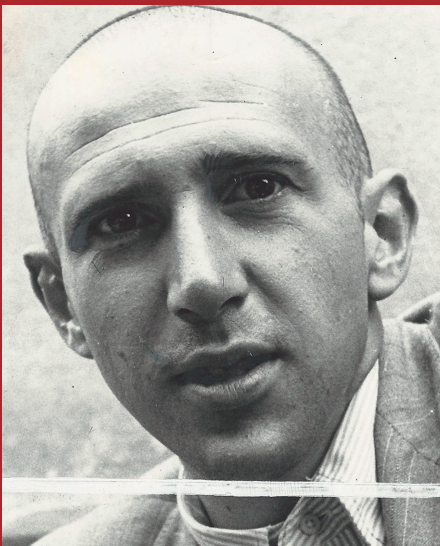
### Gregorio Cárdenas Hernández, *Goyo Cárdenas*

“It is not exaggerated that in terms of yellow press without a political context, Goyo Cárdenas represents the case of the century.

In what follows all of this plays a part: science, circus, the nation learning of the psychoanalytic vocabulary (gloriously misplaced), the joy regarding a Mexican Jack The Ripper, theater, excitement, the discovery of a shade of newsworthiness and Goyo’s flair for the dramatic. He is subjected to “medical -psychological explorations”, and his “confused state” forces them to taken to the La Castañeda General Sanatorium, where he is treated with electroshock therapy”.



Carlos Monsiváis



### Higinio Sobera de la Flor, *El Pelón Sobera*

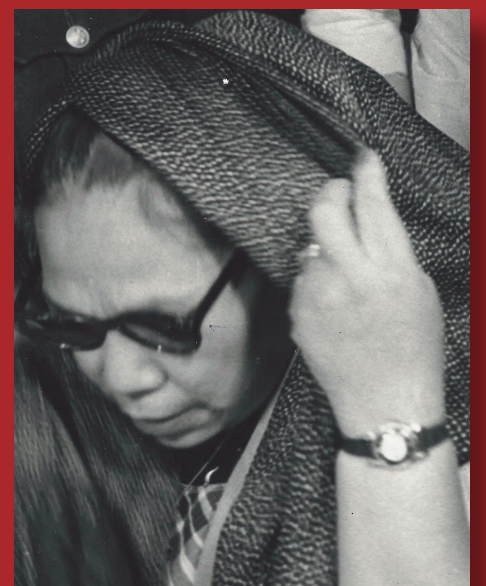
“If Sobera de la Flor is an instant legend it is due to the gratuitous nature of his crimes and his physical aspect that, according to popular belief, is even more repugnant than his behavior: shaved head, monumental cap, ‘Lombrosian’ features, an absolute lack of empathy. And ‘the monster in its purest state’, will stagnate during decades in the psychiatric ward of the Penitentiary”.

Carlos Monsiváis

### María Dolores Estévez, *Lola La Chata*

Lola *la Chata* “during the 1930s [...] several characters like *la Caballota*, *el Tigre del Pedregal*, *la Reyna de la Mariguana*, and María Dolores Estévez, *Lola la Chata*, enshrined by William Borroughs in his ‘Mexican’ novel, characterized in 1937 as ‘the most active drug mover, who practically supplied the most inveterate junkies in the city, many of them members of moneyed families”.

Carlos Monsiváis



## Yellow press country

The numbers of horror. In the neoliberal age, drug trafficking grew spectacularly and becae an important economic activity. In 2009, the security business Kroll estimated that Mexican drug traffickers earned almost 40,000 million dollars (twice the amount that entered the country in remittances). This changed the economic composition of the nation.

A study made by the Institute de Investigaciones Económicas at UNAM documented that in 2011, organized crime represented the biggest job creator in the country: it gave 600,000 people jobs.

Acording to the Rural Tribunal president, in 2009, 31.6% of farmlands in the country are used to cultivate narcotics.

That an illegal activity plays such an important part in Mexico’s economy has had disastrous consequences for society in terms of public security. Numbers don’t lie.

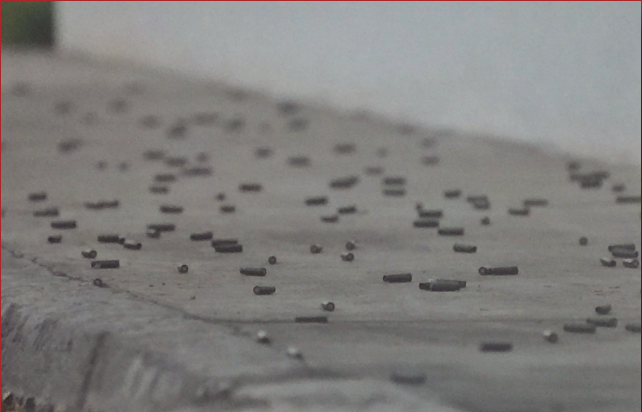
The Centro de Análisis de Políticas Públicas México Evalua think tank has stated that between 2006 and 2012 in our country there were 101,199 executions linked to organized crime.

The CIDH documented 214 migrant mass kidnappings -with 11,333 victim-, between April and September 2010.

According to requests of information, between March 2007 and March 2012, there were 40,483 reports of forced disappearances.

Monsiváis was right when he wrote:

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## Teresa Margolles

Teresa Margolles has focused her recent work on violence generated by the war against drugs unleashed in Mexico since 2007. Decálogo collects some of the first *narcomessages* registered by the national press, messages and warnings between cartels that were found in corpses murdered in score-settling assassinations. Sometimes an ice pick was used to fix the messages to the bodies. Founder of the Semefo artistic group (Forensics Medical Service), a collective that worked fro 1990 to 2000, Teresa Margolles has built an important ouvre about anonymous death that becomes a thermometer of civility both in Mexico and other countries.

Aldo Sánchez Ramírez

