

Chapter 9

GUERRILLA WARFARE

The triumph of the 1959 Cuban Revolution suggested to revolutionaries and counter-revolutionaries alike that guerrilla warfare would shape the political future of Latin America. Insurgent groups, both rural and urban, soon appeared in virtually every country of the region. Meanwhile, the armed forces of Latin American countries had entered into firm alliances with the US military, which encouraged, aided, and advised their counter-insurgency operations.

While inspired by a Marxist analysis of social conflict and by a sense of participating in a global process, Latin American insurgents believed themselves to be, above all, reenacting a centuries-old struggle against imperialism. That is why many of them took the names of past rebels whose fight they envisioned themselves to be continuing. Uruguay's Tupamaros were remembering Tupac Amaru (the eighteenth-century rebel, as well as other historical rebels who called themselves Tupamaros), Nicaragua's Sandinistas were remembering a rebel leader of the 1920s who fought against US marines, and so on. Guerrilla warfare—an "asymmetrical" battle waged by "irregular" forces (without uniforms or a state organization behind them) against a "regular" army (with both)—has a long history in Latin America. The word *guerrilla* itself (meaning "little war") was coined in Spanish around 1810. Many of the patriot fighters who won independence from Spain were guerrillas, and Argentine insurgents of the 1970s were invoking independence-era guerrillas when they called themselves Montoneros. This sense of history was largely absent in the US State Department as it organized a hemispheric counter-insurgency war against Latin American guerrilla movements.

As guerrilla insurgents proliferated in the 1960s, Latin America's regular armies began to specialize in counter-insurgency. In this they had the aid and encouragement of their allies in the US military, which established a training center, called the School of the Americas, where Latin American army officers were invited to study counter-insurgency techniques. Because guerrillas were always fewer and less well-armed than their adversaries, they relied on surprise and concealment. Once their precise location was known, however, regular troops could quickly annihilate them. This vulnerability was especially true of urban guerrillas. Therefore, counter-insurgent organizations made systematic use of torture to break the secrecy of insurgent organizations. Counter-insurgent wars often became "dirty wars" that involved large-scale violations of human rights. To cover their tracks, counter-insurgent torturers often simply "disappeared" the people whom they interrogated, arresting them without warrant, taking them to secret detention centers, and finally executing them and disposing of their bodies without a trace. Such practices, as well as the creation of "death squads" (composed of out-of-uniform soldiers and police) who unceremoniously murdered anyone believed to be supporting guerrillas, became widespread in Latin America from the 1960s to the 1980s.

This chapter provides views of insurgency and counter-insurgency in various countries of the region. The narrative of a Colombian army officer illustrates the way in which counter-insurgents tended to define guerrillas as "common criminals," rather than people fighting for a political cause. If the guerrillas were merely common criminals, after all, then there were no political issues to discuss. Unsurprisingly, the published writings of the guerrillas themselves tend to make a precisely contrary point, placing great emphasis on the idea that insurgents were involved, above all, in "revolutionary education" and "armed propaganda." The energy that guerrilla armies actually devoted to this "battle for hearts and minds" varied, of course. Uruguay's Tupamaros were famous for it. The FARC (Armed Forces of the Colombian Revolution), which has outlasted all but a handful of guerrilla organizations thanks to its ruthlessness and its incessant mobility in the labyrinthine terrain of the northern Andes, does not seem very ideologically driven today. But revolution-

ary education is highlighted in the 1960s *Diary of a Guerrilla* that chronicles the FARC's creation in the 1960s. The important role of women in Latin American guerrilla movements is brought out in several selections, principally the one on El Salvador. Women's experiences, especially the tension between their commitments to their children and their political cause, throw a different sort of light on the matter. Finally, a Chilean interrogator, interviewed years after his activities as a torturer, admits the political motivation of the people whom he tortured, without expressing any remorse about his actions. Like those who calmly defend the "enhanced interrogation techniques" applied by the United States in the early twenty-first century, "Fat Romo" justified his actions simply by claiming that they achieved the desired results.

ZARPAZO: MEMOIR OF A COLOMBIAN ARMY OFFICER

Evelio Buitrago Salazar

The memoir of Evelio Buitrago Salazar, a Colombian army officer, was published by the country's Ministry of Defense in 1968. The following extracts are the book's prologue (by another army officer), the author's account of his family background, and some remarks about the guerrilla leader, Zarpazo, whose group Buitrago had successfully infiltrated. Both the prologue and the opening passages exemplify the anti-Communist vision whereby guerrilla enemies of the government represent a malevolent, foreign, criminal force lacking any sort of political legitimacy. Buitrago also exemplifies the conservative discourse associated with Colombia's central coffee-growing region.

PROLOGUE

Evelio Buitrago Salazar, Sergeant 2nd Class in the Colombian Army here presents his memoirs of the difficult struggle against banditry, or *bandolerismo*, as we call it in Colombia.

Buitrago Salazar is 100 percent soldier, and the account of the role he played in the region of Quindío, Tolima, and Valle del Cauca is free of vanity or exaggeration. The modesty of this meritorious author, who has been decorated with the Cross of Boyacá, certainly speaks well of him. Without diminishing the well-deserved fame of Sergeant Buitrago, one can affirm that in this memoir many Colombian army veterans will find echoes of their own heroic deeds, their own blows struck for social peace and order.

In Colombia, it has been said, politicians start internal wars and leave military men to make peace. The quotation indicates the singular vocation of the Colombian army to defend our national Constitution. To restore peace to our violence-stricken cities and countryside the police and armed forces have given their best: their youth, their enthusiasm, and their blood. What more can we ask of these selfless heroes?

Thanks to their efforts over a period of years, the peace of God, preached with peerless love in Christ's Sermon on the Mount, reigns once again in the Republic of Colombia. The *bandolero* spawn of barbarism has been pursued, driven to its lair, cornered, and destroyed. All that remains of the bandoleros is the sad memory of an epoch that will never come again.

Buitrago merely tells his story and does not discuss the causes of violence in Colombia, which would clarify nothing, serve no useful purpose, merely arouse passions, provoke a polemic, and perhaps raise devastating flames from the smoldering ashes. Buitrago shows us uniformed soldiers using their weapons honorably for the betterment of society, just as the dying Simón Bolívar commanded. He also reveals the moral bankruptcy of our bandolero foes, stripped

SOURCE: adapted from Evelio Buitrago Salazar, *Zarpazo: Otra cara de la violencia (Memorias de un suboficial del ejército de Colombia)* (Bogotá: Ministry of Defense, 1968), pp. 5–16.

here of the romantic aura that sometimes surrounds them and which they have, in fact, never deserved. Bandoleros like Zarpazo do not really fight for a political ideal. Cruelty, crudity, greed, treachery, cowardice, wantonness, ignorance, and insanity—these are the true attributes of bandoleros like Zarpazo. Bandolerismo constitutes a dangerous running sore that, if unattended, threatens the life of our whole society. This book indicates the proper treatment, strong, painful, but indispensable if the patient is to be saved.

These bandoleros appeared at an unfortunate moment in the history of Colombia, taking advantage of our prolonged and bloody political controversies to rob and murder and establish their gangs in certain key economic regions of the country. Had it not been for the energetic intervention of the armed forces, Colombia would soon have bled to death, and Communist forces from the other side of the world, taking advantage of our confusion and weakness during the period of *la Violencia*,* would have invaded, grinding the privileged land of our founding fathers Santander and Nariño under foreign boot heels. Instead of our yellow, red, and blue tricolor, the Colombian flag would today bear the hammer and sickle of Communism. We all owe a debt of eternal gratitude to the officers and soldiers who sacrificed their lives in order that such a travesty should not come to pass.

May our children and grandchildren never witness the return of bandolerismo, and may this book, with its salutary lessons, contribute to the preservation of the peace of God.

Retired Col. Guillermo Plazas Olarte

I WAS BORN IN SEVILLA

I was born and raised in the town of Sevilla in the Cauca Valley, at 1,500 meters above sea level, nicknamed the Coffee-Growing Capital of Colombia. My father, a true son of Sevilla, owned pastures and groves of plantains just ten minutes outside of town. My mother was

*A period of protracted political strife from the late 1940s to the late 1950s.

from a good family, a woman selflessly devoted to the care of her numerous children, in the conservative tradition of the coffee-growing region. But mine was not a family of those rich and powerful "oligarchs" that the subversives talk about. Rather, I grew up in what was, for that part of Colombia, an average family—religious, ambitious, and hard-working.

My town was a privileged place, carved out of the tropical forest by resolute men who felled and burned its trees to bless Colombia with the gift of fertile soils. Sevilla had about 70,000 inhabitants back in the 1930s, when I was christened. The houses were of plastered brick or mud-daub construction, and the climate was perfect for the cultivation of our leading national crop. Coffee bushes grew on the surrounding hillsides in the protective shade of plantain and guamo trees. Red coffee beans tumbled from the calloused hands of hired pickers into harvest baskets and from there into burlap sacks. One saw coffee beans spread out to dry in the sun everywhere in the outskirts of town. The smell of the beans impregnated the roads outside of town, as mule trains and shouting muleteers passed at irregular intervals carrying sacks of coffee to market. The aroma of roasted coffee saturated people's houses, floated through the long streets of stores, schools, banks, hospitals, and churches, and rose to the heavens. Coffee from Sevilla provided good money for everyone in town—the pickers, the processors, the wholesalers—and then off it went across the oceans of the world to distant ports, where it was converted into dollars!

That was Sevilla at the time of my birth in the Year of Our Lord 1936, a land where people lived intensely, working hard and making money, wheeling, dealing, and of course, eating plenty of good Colombian food—*arepas* and *sancocho*. It was a land for both rich and poor, for elegant women and self-made men, horse traders and horse breakers, where the mules were even better than the horses, a place where a man could drink *aguardiente* and shoot a game of billiards any time of day, dancing to the blaring music of a jukebox with one of those painted girls that made plenty of us lose our heads. Fluffy clouds filled the skies, unfurled above the green Andean mountainsides of Sevilla like banners of peace.

Only later did I learn of the horrors of violence, the violence that carried away my father, devoured my uncles, and diminished my inheritance. In 1953, my mother, my seven brothers and sisters, and I moved to the big city, to Cali, where we went to school and started to spend a fortune on tuition, uniforms, and books. My father stayed behind to administer our property. He was a real man. Our property was steep and hilly, but it produced plenty, and soon we had electric lights at our big house in the county, and we owned four other houses, as well. We had sugarcane, and a mill, and in the evening the smell of molasses was in the air and one of the young day laborers would pull out an instrument and play a *bambuco*.** The roosters of the early morning crowed with jubilation, as if announcing the success of the sugar milling. We accepted day laborers belonging to any political party, without hateful discrimination. On Sundays, my father would lead them to church to give thanks to heaven and, after mass, buy supplies for the coming week.

The Peace of God reigned until 1954, when violence reared its ugly head in Sevilla. The undeclared civil war of the late 1940s had left a number of guerrilla gangs out in the mountains, pardoned by the government but accustomed, by then, to the easy profits of robbery and pillage. Let the "new wave" of academic sociologists make their exhaustive studies of the causes of violence in Colombia. Who cares about their interesting theories! The fact is that the gangs who remained from the civil war turned into simple bandoleros, without political ideals, lacking human feelings, devoted to kidnapping and murder. Their leaders were the famous Sangre Negra, Chispas, Zapazo (whom I came to know so well), and others who had traveled every inch of the terrain they dominated and could therefore easily outmaneuver and ambush the army contingents sent to control them. They terrorized the rural people, who collaborated with them and paid them protection money for fear of losing their lives and property.

As all this is well known, I might have omitted a description of these fiends. But outside of Colombia there are some perfectly

**The same dance as that of the "happy slaves" in the nineteenth-century novel *María*.

decent people, and even influential authors, who remain entirely misinformed about the true character of our bandolerismo, as I have described it here. Eventually, my hand would punish these blood-thirsty monsters who had managed to escape the control and just retribution of society, sadly famous delinquents whom foreigners and sociologists have tried to justify and defend. I am one of so many military men whose duty it was to face the criminal bandoleros. I write these truthful memoirs two thousand kilometers from Colombia, in Lima, the beautiful capital of Peru, where nothing can disturb my impartiality. This is my story.

Analyzing the Sources: What were the basic characteristics of Colombian society, according to this author, before "common criminals" known as bandoleros began to "masquerade" as revolutionaries? How does he account for the violence plaguing Colombia?

DIARY OF A GUERRILLA

Jacobo Arenas

During the years in which Evelio Buitrago was fighting "bandolero" groups, some of those groups were coalescing into Colombia's largest and most durable rural guerrilla army, the FARC, or Armed Forces of the Colombian Revolution. The following selections from the diary of FARC commander Jacobo Arenas, published in 1969, can be read as a direct counterpoint to Buitrago's narrative. Arenas quotes at length the teachings of a man that Buitrago regarded as a "bandolero," Manuel Marulanda (commonly called "Tirofijo," meaning Sureshot) who led the FARC for more than three decades after the death of Arenas.

PROLOGUE

Here is a book written by a guerrilla fighter, comrade Jacobo Arenas, a member of the Executive Committee of the Communist Party of Colombia and ranking leader of the FARC. It is a war diary that recounts the assault launched by the Colombian army, under the guidance of Yanqui military advisors, against the rural, guerrilla-controlled zone known as Marquetalia. The book gives the profile of true popular heroes, such as Manuel Marulanda, whom the government presents as "the bandit, Tirofijo," and who has escaped a dozen times from efforts, carried out by thousands of soldiers, to surround and capture him.

The armed struggle of the Colombian revolution has not been dreamed up by a few leaders, however. To the contrary, it responds to urgent, concrete social needs. It is a prolonged popular war that has gone through three stages: in 1949–1953, the masses responded to the assassination of the popular leader Jorge Eliécer Gaitán; in 1954–1957, the masses responded to the attack on them by the military dictatorship, creating rural strongholds in the heights of the central Andean range, the most important being Marquetalia; from 1964 to today, guerrilla activity has spread through much of the Colombian countryside. In 1967, the commander of Colombia's armed forces claimed that this is merely a local manifestation of a global struggle "between Communism and democracy," but that is clearly the influence of his North American strategic advisors. Colombia's rural guerrilla war is, in fact, an act of self-defense on the part of peasant combatants who seek merely their own liberation.

THE FALL OF MARQUETALIA

Marquetalia is an area centering on a small plateau high in one of the three Andean cordilleras that run through Colombia, the middle one, not far from the snowcapped heights of the Nevado del

SOURCE: adapted from Jacobo Arenas, *Diario de la resistencia de Marquetalia* (Bogotá: Ediciones Abejón Mono, 1972), pp. 7–15, 21–23, 33–36, 47–56.

Huila. Altogether, Marquetalia has an area of about three hundred square kilometers. Since colonial times, the basis of the population has been the Páez people, Indians who fought hard against the Spanish invaders and since then have coexisted with the Spanish-speaking peasants who also live in the mountains. In April 1964, when we learned of the Colombian government's decision to liquidate it, Marquetalia was also the redoubt of guerrillas who had migrated in from more northerly, coffee-growing areas of the cordillera in search of a safe haven.

Against Marquetalia, where we had taken refuge, the government was planning to send sixteen thousand troops, combining infantry and artillery, the first ones to be brought in by air transport, following an aerial bombardment. Marquetalia would be surrounded and besieged, and we expected any sign of resistance on the part of the peasants to provoke the army's deployment of biological weapons. Furthermore, the assault was to commence almost immediately.

The leadership called a general assembly to discuss our tactics. As it happened, the assembly began on 17 May 1964, the day before the radio announced that the army was launching its Operation Marquetalia. The assembly debated a number of matters, beginning with the problem of evacuating the numerous families of noncombatants. Other discussions turned on the option of constant mobility—without a permanent home base, living off the land—a new form of rural guerrilla warfare that we decided to adopt.

The government forces advanced against us, and we eluded them, striking back at moments of our choosing. We pitched our tents here one night, there the next, moving ever deeper into the jungle, fighting often, but also discussing issues and reading and writing like a bunch of revolutionary philosophers. At one peasant hut, I established a sort of rustic office and study. My desk was a three-legged table which we also used for eating and the chair was a section of tree trunk. That tilted "seat" killed my back. I wrote on an old typewriter that my guerrillas had taken turns carrying day after day. When I typed, it made an infernal racket. Yet, nothing is more important than communications, propaganda, and the effort to awaken a revolutionary consciousness among peasants and workers.

THE TEACHINGS OF TIROFIJO

In my notebook I have collected the teachings of our Comandante Manuel Marulanda, which I transcribe here:

Every guerrilla, every member of our movement must study political as well as military problems so as to be able to explain our revolutionary aims, such as freeing the country from North American oppression and, for the peasants, a true land reform that would destroy the monopoly hold of the great estates. And education is vital, too, to counteract the enemy's systematic attempts to confuse and misinform the People. The revolution cannot triumph without massive popular support.

Our own self-discipline is also a form of political education. If we hold ourselves to a high standard and adhere closely to the regulations that we have made for the good of the revolution, the People will learn from our example. If they see true, principled revolutionaries in us, we will win their support for our struggle. And their support is the greatest good for the revolution.

Guerrillas must be morally strong, maintain a positive spirit, and reject fear. Don't worry about the airplanes. Let them strafe us, bombard us, photograph us, drop their leaflets, try to infect us with bacteria, and spend and spend money, because the faster they spend it all the sooner this oligarchic government will come crashing down. A fearful guerrilla cannot do political work among the masses, nor can a guerrilla do so successfully without high moral standards. When a guerrilla moves among the People, among his class brothers and his potential comrades in the struggle, he should not lay a finger on anything that does not belong to him. Now, we do take things from the enemy, but that is entirely another matter, and the difference must be clear to all.

Let no one mistake us for bandoleros. We are revolutionaries, not thieves, and if it were not an imperative of the struggle, we would not take things from the enemy, either. We are not fighting for personal interest or gain. Profit is the principle of capitalists, but it should not be ours. We are against that philosophy. Our motto must be the good of the People, and our behavior must be selfless and blameless. A true communist revolutionary believes in collectivism. As guerrillas, everything

that we have, we have in common. Our life of constant movement reinforces this goal. When the revolution triumphs, some of us may want to own individual property again, but the majority, having absorbed the new revolutionary spirit, will surely be beyond that.

Our greatest enemy is imperialism. These uniformed soldiers who shoot at us here in the mountains are just puppets, after all, the puppets of generals, politicians, bankers, industrialists, great landowners—the Colombian oligarchy, in a word. But the oligarchs are puppets, too, in the end, and do the bidding of Yanqui Imperialism, which is not only our greatest enemy, but the enemy of all the Peoples of the earth. In any poor country where downtrodden people rise up and reach for a better life, a Yanqui invasion happens immediately. But if the countries of Latin America rise up together, the United States won't be able to occupy them all at once. The people of Cuba have set the great example, in that regard, for our entire continent.

Those are the words of Manuel Marulanda, thirty-five years old, married, and the father of five children. He is a peasant and the son of peasants. Circumstances made him a guerrilla, and now he is among the movement's most important leaders. Reactionaries and imperialists call him “the bandolero Tirofijo,” trying to undercut the political prestige of this ranking member of the Colombian Communist Party, precisely because he has caused the army so many nightmares during his fifteen years of revolutionary struggle.

Analyzing the Sources: The discourse of Marxist revolutionaries is a mirror image of anticommunist discourse. Contrast this author's picture of the background, motives, character, and aims of the insurgency against the picture presented by Buitrago Salazar.

THE TUPAMAROS IN ACTION

Movement for National Liberation

The Tupamaros of the 1960s and 1970s (formally the Movement for National Liberation, appearing here as a collective author) were urban guerrillas who carried out flamboyant actions, a sort of guerrilla theater calculated to win public sympathy for their revolutionary struggle. The following discussion of tactics and the role of women in urban guerrilla warfare is taken from materials that the Tupamaros published in Mexico in 1972, shortly before the Uruguayan government succeeded in destroying the movement.

THE TACTICS OF URBAN GUERRILLA WARFARE

It is a characteristic of urban guerrilla warfare that practically all the enemy's assets are vulnerable to surprise attack. Ambushing and annihilating an enemy contingent—quite an arduous maneuver for rural guerrillas—is a simple, everyday operation for urban guerrillas. The urban guerrilla struggles in the very bosom of the enemy. Absolutely all the regime's personnel, beginning with the president himself, are close at hand and exposed in an urban environment. The regime's communications systems and strategic installations are always vulnerable to bombing by an urban guerrilla force willing to sacrifice human lives to achieve its goals. However, urban guerrilla warfare does not consist in the constant and indiscriminate application of such violent methods. Rather, its tactics conform to its larger strategic objectives, both military and political. Failure to apply drastic methods can be a critical mistake at a decisive moment. The application of revolutionary violence can be counterproductive, on the other hand, when the consciousness of the people has not yet become sufficiently indignant owing to the crimes of the regime. Guerrilla warfare must always be, in part,

SOURCE: adapted from Movimiento de Liberación Nacional, *Los tupamaros en acción* (Mexico City: Editorial Diogenes, 1972), pp. 56–61.

political warfare, and this is especially true for urban guerrillas, who live and fight in intimate contact with the urban multitude. Any violent action without clearly evident and understandable political objectives can result in a setback for the movement in the eyes of the people.

In pursuit of its strategic goals, the Movement for National Liberation has experimented with a variety of tactics.

Sabotage. Sabotage such as cutting telephone or power lines, which may cause disruptions affecting workers, should be sparingly used in the initial stages of a conflict because of its potentially adverse impact on public opinion. Sabotage of purely military and state targets is much more acceptable to the people.

Attacks against the repressive forces themselves. This is surely the most direct method of bringing down a regime: eliminating the human agents of repression, the army and the police. The simple destruction of the regime's armed forces may be sufficient to cause regime collapse in many cases.

Reprisals. Both the people and the repressive forces of the regime more clearly understand the political logic of revolutionary violence when it constitutes a reprisal for acts of regime injustice, such as a specific official murder or torture, an abusive judicial verdict, or the arbitrary mass firing of workers.

Use of explosives. A timed explosive device in a public place may cause unnecessary casualties among the population, which means that such operations rarely produce an overall positive outcome for the movement.

The people's prison. Abducting regime personnel and imprisoning them in a secret location (whether they are murderous agents of repression or key public figures) can be a highly effective tactic. It protects our own prisoners in the hands of the state, forces it to moderate its repression, and obliges it to spend considerable resources

searching for the people's prison and protecting government officials around the clock. It can also be used against employers who abuse their workers and is particularly good as a reprisal for specific misdeeds.

Supply operations. Vehicles, houses, and other spaces constitute the physical refuge for urban guerrillas, comparable to the Sierra Maestra for the rural guerrillas of Cuba, and operations that help procure these elements are of vital importance to the struggle.

Houses of the enemy. The houses of revolutionary fighters are constantly occupied by the forces of repression to intimidate the families. Urban guerrillas can retaliate in kind by temporarily occupying the formerly untouchable mansions of ranking members of the armed forces, the government, and the oligarchy, as well as those of foreign imperialists.

Armed propanganda. All guerrilla warfare expresses itself primarily through armed actions, but urban guerrillas also employ other means of communication with the people. Radio and television studios may be occupied in order to transmit proclamations, for example. Movie theaters may be occupied for the same purpose, and the proclamations projected on screen, read over a loudspeaker, or distributed on printed handouts. Factories may be occupied to create a dialogue with workers.

WOMEN'S ROLE IN URBAN GUERRILLA WARFARE

Women witness and experience social injustice just as men do, and just as men, they experience the need to become revolutionaries. Women therefore contribute equally to the revolution, even providing service as combatants. Today, not without considerable effort, the Movement for National Liberation offers roles of political militancy to women, abandoning outmoded social prejudice for the good of the revolution. Women have to overcome many difficulties in order to become revolutionaries, because capitalist society assigns a

particular, highly limited role to women and educates them for that role, depriving them of adequate physical education and limiting their initiative, creativity, and assertiveness. A traditional woman's education in Uruguay contributes almost nothing to the formation of an urban guerrilla fighter. Every new female recruit must therefore fight a double battle against the forces of repression, on the one hand, and against her own upbringing, on the other. But the double battle only tests and strengthens her revolutionary commitment.

Women have a privileged role in urban guerrilla warfare. Compañeras of all ages can serve to great advantage in communications, as carriers of messages and small objects. The ability of women to modify their dress and appearance allows them to blend into a variety of social contexts and escape the detection of agents of repression. The presence of women is absolutely essential in safe houses located in whatever neighborhood of the city. The compañera posing as the housewife can establish friendly relations with the neighbors, deflect suspicions, and scout the surroundings for possible threats. Her daily round of shopping allows her to learn the neighborhood routines and detect anything abnormal. Women contribute to our political work among the masses, as well as helping train new recruits to the MLN in the basics of the urban guerrilla's clandestine life.

In addition, almost every strike team will include at least one woman. Considerable experience has indicated the advisability of this approach. Once, the MLN used women on strike teams only exceptionally, to accomplish some particular task. Today, however, women participate routinely at all levels of military operations, from initial planning through final execution, drawing fully on their revolutionary potential.

Finally, and importantly, women contribute constantly, by their mere presence, to maintaining the revolutionary unity and camaraderie, thanks to the feminine touch mentioned by Che in his writings on guerrilla warfare. The contribution may be a delicious meal cooked at a rare opportunity for relaxation, possibly a sisterly gesture that helps alleviate the stress of a combatant's life, or perhaps a woman's habitual cultivation of social relationships that help her compañeros deepen their collective commitment to the revolution.

Consider a Tupamara's actions in the following scene. The agents of repression are carrying out a dragnet operation, surrounding a number of city blocks and systematically searching them, house by house. They have arrived at a corner near an MLN safe house, which is also the residence of a compañera. Aware of the immediacy of danger, the Tupamara quickly and decisively puts crucial organizational materials into a gym bag and covers them with a towel, leaving it partly visible in the opening of the bag. When she steps onto the sidewalk, the uniformed agents of the regime are only twenty meters away from the door. With relaxed grace, the young compañera steps into the assembled crowd of curious onlookers. Almost immediately, she notices an agent of the regime following her. Although nothing disturbs her apparent calm, her thoughts are racing. Upon arriving at the bus stop, she turns and smiles at him.

"Where are you headed, babe?" he inquires.

"To the swimming pool." The towel visible in her bag corroborates her statement.

"What a shame that I'm on duty."

The Tupamara gets on the bus. Her training and quick thinking have preserved her own liberty and saved important organizational materials from falling into enemy hands.

Analyzing the Sources: What is the difference between the sort of tactics employed by the MLN on the one hand and terrorist tactics on the other? Were the Tupamaros protofeminists?

THEY WON'T TAKE ME ALIVE

Claribel Alegría

The lives of several Salvadoran guerrilla fighters were narrated in 1983 by the writer Claribel Alegría on the basis of personal interviews. The main subjects are female guerrilla leaders, as indicated by the book's subtitle: Salvadoran Women in the Struggle. The book particularly follows the life of a couple, Eugenia and Javier, Eugenia being the more important guerrilla leader, but Javier, the chief witness, because the interviews were

done after Eugenia's death at an army roadblock. The book's title, *They Won't Take Me Alive*, records Eugenia's last words.

Javier: One of the great drawbacks of life in the clandestine underground is the way that it limits personal relationships. That was especially true for Eugenia, who had thousands of friends. She accepted the limitations of that kind of life as an inevitable aspect of the revolutionary path that she had chosen in joining the Popular Liberation Forces. Her clandestine life began in 1977 and lasted until her death.

Interviewer/narrator: Tell us a bit about the life of a couple in the clandestine underground.

Javier: Our love sprang not only from personal attraction, but also from very many shared values, from the way that we both regarded the plight of the common people, from stuff that had been on our minds since the events of 1974, from the whole process whereby we both became involved in the revolutionary struggle for national liberation. We went through all of that together. And what we felt about each other grew during our work with rural laborers in the early years. So it was a relationship that started with an initial attraction but really developed and deepened over time. We were very much in love by the time that we decided to get married, and our marriage was born and existed totally within the framework of the revolutionary struggle. Both of us were clear that the struggle of our people and our participation in the Popular Liberation Forces were the most fundamental things in our lives.

Going underground obliged us to accept that we couldn't necessarily be together all the time. We knew that there were risks of

SOURCE: adapted from Claribel Alegría and D. J. Flakoll, *No me agarran viva: La mujer salvadoreña en lucha* (Mexico City: Ediciones Era, 1983), pp. 64–65, 68–69, 97–99.

losing one another that we couldn't foresee. We were very aware of that aspect right from the start, and we talked about it a lot. We also talked about the matter of children, whether to have them or not, and even though both of us wanted very much for our love to bear fruit, we decided that during our first year we wouldn't have any children because we did not yet know what life in the underground would be like. Until then we had worked openly as political organizers. We were able to stay together during the first two years of our clandestine life, but only relatively together, because our revolutionary assignments were different ones. . . .

After many months underground, we went back to talking about having a child and still found it a very tough proposition. We began to consider the probable risks and consequences in detail, beyond pregnancy and childbirth, the challenges of raising and educating a kid under such difficult circumstances—living in a “safe house,” as parents always under threat, and so on. But after a couple of years, when we had thought the whole matter through, we decided to go ahead. Both of us really wanted to have a child. Eugenia had her own very personal vision of what motherhood would mean to her. One of the things that she always said was that she wanted the child to belong to the movement, to belong not just to us, but also to the comrades who were fighting beside us. She was sure that, if something happened to her and to me, our comrades would become the parents.

Eugenia was already taking responsibilities that entailed a very heavy work load, and before deciding the thing about a child, she had a medical checkup and found out that she was extremely anemic. The doctor recommended that she should not become pregnant for at least three months. That was around July, and before those three months were up the enemy captured me. (*Eugenia and Javier were eventually able to have a daughter.*)

Interviewer/narrator: The Salvadoran National Guard captured Javier along with Eugenia's sister, Marta, and other comrades at a safe house on the outskirts of San Salvador on 16 October 1978. Marta was nine months pregnant at the time. I questioned Marta and several other women commanders on the subject of children.

Marta: It's a big problem. You get tremendously attached to kids, and yet you have to be ready to leave your child at a moment's notice. Having children is the most beautiful experience that there is, and the most revolutionary experience, too, I believe. Our strategy of a prolonged people's war doesn't mean you can't have a child. Our organization always encouraged us to go ahead with our family lives despite the war and all its limitations. The problem was that each stage of the fighting got harsher and harsher.

When I had my first child, for example, the situation was a bit better, though still very dangerous. So you raise children with all the limitations of the work you do, but in a more proletarian and collectivist setting than otherwise, and that allows you to do the work and be a mother, too. Out in the countryside it is more difficult to have a child with you, right now, on one of the guerrilla fronts, but until 1980 kids could still live with us there and carry on family life. It is a beautiful experience that requires great sacrifices. Mothers who are revolutionaries have to make more sacrifices than mothers who aren't. We have to sleep less, for example, to keep up with our work.

As far as it is able, the organization takes responsibility for our children in our absence. The policy is to keep them and raise them in the spirit of the organization and not turn them over to relatives unless we really have nobody to take care of them. You turn them over to relatives, and they could be raised according to different political principles.

Nadia: I got married pretty young. Sometimes I think that I grew up prematurely because I started this work so young. A seventeen-year-old girl who becomes involved in underground military operations acquires a different mindset. The comrade I married belongs to the same organization. I recruited him. We joined only a few months apart. We've been separated now for about three years, on very good terms, and we're still good friends. There were just some things that he never could understand. I'd get home late or not get home at all some nights, and even though he knew that I was out doing revolutionary work, he couldn't avoid his machismo in spite of all his political education. He comes from a peasant background. And I, on my

side of it, wasn't able to make him understand the demands of the work that I was doing.

Anyway, we have a son who is seven years old now. He was with us until he was one year old, and then it just became impossible to keep him, carrying him around in the woods, to meetings, and so on. And we didn't want to leave him with anybody. It didn't make sense. So after that he went to live with my parents, but I went to see him often until 1975, when my older brother and his wife were killed in combat. That created a very difficult situation for my family. The police were constantly after me. They knew where my son was and thought I was bound to turn up there sooner or later. So for safety reasons I didn't see him for fourteen months. It was the most difficult time in my whole life. He's still with my parents. When the surveillance finally relaxed, I was able to get back in touch with him, but not daily or even weekly. I've tried to concern myself with his emotional and political development as much as possible and have talked about it a lot with my parents. Despite the fact that my husband and I are separated, we have an excellent relationship with our son.

He is in contact with both of us and knows that we are separated but that we both love him. Now that he is seven years old he is beginning to understand that his mom and dad are off doing important work to help the poor. That's the way that he thinks of it. He knows that he should not talk about the things we tell him, and that doesn't bother him. It isn't easy for him, naturally, because it's not easy for any of us. We've managed to stay in touch and to guide him in basic ways so that he identifies with us, but we know that ordinarily a child ought to be with his parents.

The way things are in this country, though, under wartime conditions, I don't think that my concern as a mother can be restricted to a single child, because there are millions of children in El Salvador. I even think that if I didn't participate actively in the struggle to liberate my people I would not be morally qualified to raise my own child. Concentrating just on him would make me a hypocrite who allows things in this country to continue as they are. It's a contradiction that we have to face. The interests of our people as a whole must come first, even in the way that we organize our personal lives. That

was a hard lesson for me to learn, because it is a painful thing sometimes, but I believe wholeheartedly that maternity is not merely a personal matter, that it has a historical dimension as well.

Analyzing the Sources: Even the most committed anticommunist could hardly view these Salvadoran revolutionary women as "common criminals." And yet some might consider them excessively wedded to their ideological vision. What do you think?

CONFESSIONS OF A TORTURER

Nancy Guzmán

In the following selection, Chilean journalist Nancy Guzmán interviews Osvaldo Romo, alias "Fat Romo," an infamous interrogator and torturer who worked for Chile's military government following the 1973 overthrow of the popularly elected Marxist president Salvador Allende's Popular Unity government in the US-backed coup led by General Augusto Pinochet. By 1994–95, when Romo was interviewed by Guzmán, he had been extradited from Brazil by the restored democratic government of Chile, where he had been tried and imprisoned for his crimes. However, he was quite unrepentant.

Nancy Guzmán: Why don't you tell me how you got involved in intelligence work?

Romo: The armed forces realized that they couldn't get all those Marxist-Leninist MIR* guys without my help. And that's why Lieutenant Miguel Kraanoff Martchenko showed up at my house one day. He showed up in a military vehicle and my wife got upset when she saw it, but I calmed her down and told her that I had to converse with

SOURCE: adapted from Nancy Guzmán, *Romo: Confesiones de un torturador* (Santiago: Editorial Planeta Chilena, 2000), pp. 69–70, 117, 140, 159–160, 172.

*Movement of the Revolutionary Left.

him in private. She got upset because she had no idea about my work. Us intelligence people couldn't even tell our mothers what we were doing, see, and my wife thought that I was a community organizer.

The lieutenant told me that they'd been having a tough time catching those MIR guys and that I could help them out, because they'd arrest people sometimes and get fooled by them and let them go. I listened to his proposal and accepted it because the working conditions that he offered were very good. Anyway, it was patriotic duty, because the Popular Unity government was really corrupt and the army was basically saving the country, see? Saving the country . . .

Nancy Guzmán: Why do you repeat that? Are you maybe not so convinced that it's true?

Romo: No, look, I know that you don't understand what went on here in Chile, because you're too young to remember. But it was anarchy, okay? Hey, maybe those MIR guys had some good ideas, right? But nothing practical. The army isn't going to let a revolution happen here. They've got that Prussian discipline, you know. And anyway, Pinochet made his own revolution, is what I say. He really changed the country. In Chile only the army can make revolutions. And anyway, a civil war would have been worse and a lot more people would have died.

"El Chicho" (that was Allende's nickname) got half the country to go along with him. He was full of lies, but they believed him. I'm going to put all that in the book I'm writing. Oh yeah, Allende liked living high, all right. He always wanted the best, and meanwhile he had everybody else eating crap and standing in long lines to get it, too.

I saw all that before the military takeover, and the army didn't just barge in, either, because everybody was clamoring for them to do it. That's why I decided to collaborate with their project of national reconstruction.

Nancy Guzmán: You weren't working for national reconstruction but for the secret police, which stand accused of killing many people.

Romo: Look. It was an intelligence organization.

Nancy Guzmán: Explain to me what you mean by that.

Romo: An intelligence organization infiltrates the population to find out who might be extremists and what they are planning to do. . . .

Nancy Guzmán: Explain to me what you understand by “extremist.”

Romo: Look, I learned to identify extremists at the US School of the Americas in Panama. Because I was there, you know. And I was around extremists, too, after all, in those poor neighborhoods. Extremists are smart. They aren’t dummies, a little crazy, maybe, but very intelligent. They are Marxists or Marxist-Leninists. Have you read Marx or Lenin? That’s what the extremists read and what they base their actions on. They try to create the necessary conditions for a popular uprising, so that they can install the dictatorship of the proletariat and cut off a lot of heads. Heck yeah, I studied Marxism. Those MIR guys used to go to my house to ask me about it, and we would talk.

Nancy Guzmán: Do you think that the MIR prisoners of the secret police could have avoided what happened?

Romo: Well, they were the tough guys who said that they planned to seize power by force, in defiance of the armed forces, right? But they were all talk, pure blah blah blah, because at the moment of truth some of them wet their pants.

Nancy Guzmán: You call them cowards. But what would you have done, Romo, if somebody kidnapped you, tied you up, tortured you, and said they were going to kill you?

Romo: I already told you. I have military training and would be able to resist any form of torture because that’s what they teach you at the School of the Americas. Look. (Romo rolled up a pants leg to

show some barely visible scars.) These are the marks that I got in Panama when they taught me to torture and to resist torture. Yep, that’s what they train you to do. They tortured me there, so don’t come telling me that the Chilean secret police torture so much, because that’s nothing. And, anyway, those MIR guys were no bunch of harmless doves, because they had weapons, and they were criminals who didn’t really care about Chile. They were “internationalists,” see? Their country was supposedly the whole world.

Nancy Guzmán: Don’t tell me that these seventeen- or eighteen-year-old kids were dangerous criminals. Why didn’t you turn them over to the regular police so that they could be punished in the manner indicated by law?

Romo: There wasn’t anybody there as young as that.

Nancy Guzmán: Martín Elgueta was only twenty-one years old.

Romo: Look. I am the one who arrested Martín Elgueta, and I tell you that he was no saint, okay? He had Cuban training and went around armed to the teeth. He carried a magnum pistol here (lifting his pants leg again to show his ankle), and do you have any idea what kind of hole a magnum bullet makes? But, of course, you catch these folks and afterward their mothers cry and say that their little doves would not hurt a fly. But it wasn’t so.

Nancy Guzmán: What were the tortures like?

Romo: That depends. There was the electric grill, as we called it, like a set of bed springs made of metal strips on which the prisoners would lie tied spread-eagled, and we’d put electrodes on their genitals, in their mouths, in their ears, any place there was a bit of moisture. Sometimes we’d toss a bucket of water on them, too. Then (laughing and rubbing his hands together) we’d crank them up a little.

Nancy Guzmán: What do you mean by “crank them up”?

Romo: We had a little generator that you crank to produce electric current.

Nancy Guzmán: How did the tortured people react?

Romo: Oh, they'd jump and scream and twist around, and yep, it's true, sometimes they'd piss and shit on themselves. But nothing would happen to them. They don't die. They feel like they are going to die, but they don't. Sometimes it actually does them good.

Nancy Guzmán: Were you present during the tortures?

Romo: Yes, but not torturing. I was interrogating them to determine what organization they belonged to, this one or that one, where they fit. I figured that out.

Nancy Guzmán: And you did the same with the women?

Romo: Well, sure. They were doing the same stuff as the men. Hey, let me tell you, the women are even tougher than the men. They're tougher and they're meaner. They get into political stuff without thinking about their families and what they're getting into, and then they whine about daddy and the kids.

Nancy Guzmán: And did the women who disappeared die under torture?

Romo: I don't know because they were fine when I last saw them. Look, I'd go home in the afternoon, and the next day I'd ask where what's-her-name was, and they'd say she was transferred, and that's all I know.

Nancy Guzmán: And how about the rapes?

Romo: You're really stuck on that. It's a big lie, a story that the Marxists tell. Who was going to rape a bunch of dirty, filthy, disgusting women with urine and blood running down their legs?

You've got no idea what you are talking about. Those women were in a room without a toilet, and they did everything in there, everything, in a bunch of cans, yep, cans like house paint comes in, and they never washed. There were places where they just did it on the floor and then slept there. So just imagine how they smelled. And there wasn't any toilet paper there, uh uh. You think somebody was going to touch them and risk getting some kind of infection?

Analyzing the Sources: How did Romo view the people whose torture he supervised? How did he view the act of torture itself?