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*Conspiracy Theories*

# **CONSPIRACY NARRATIVES SOUTH OF THE BORDER**

**BAD HOMBRES DO THE TWIST**

Gonzalo Soltero

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# Conspiracy Narratives South of the Border

This book examines four conspiracy narratives from Mexico that push the boundaries of conspiracy research in a new direction. They include narratives about Lee Harvey Oswald's visit to Mexico City, shortly before he apparently assassinated JFK, and street gangs across borders and how some of our worst fears are projected onto them.

Mexico is a fertile terrain for conspiracy theories due to its complex social environment and its proximity to the United States, which not only made it a strategic platform during the Cold War but also today's land of bad hombres Donald Trump intends to fend off with a wall. Conspiracy theories are always narrative in nature, telling us about the state of the world and the actors behind such conditions. This narrativity tends to be so enthralling that they have increasingly become the substance of entertainment and even politics. This volume analyses Mexican conspiracy narratives and explains how they produce meaning in a variety of social and political contexts.

This book will be of interest to researchers of conspiracy theories, crime and its representations, Mexican politics and society and US–Latin American relations.

**Gonzalo Soltero** is an author and a professor at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) in León, Guanajuato.

## Abbreviations

AGN	National General Archive
ARRB	Assassinations Records Review Board
BER	Bloque Estudiantil Revolucionario
BSE	bovine spongiform encephalopathy
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CE	Commission Exhibit
CSEW	Crime Survey for England and Wales
DFS	Federal Directorate of Security
EZLN	Zapatista Army of National Liberation
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
FGR	Federal District Attorney
FLN	National Liberation Front
FOAF	friend of a friend
GRU	Russian Main Intelligence Directorate
HSCA	House Select Committee on Assassinations
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IMSS	Mexican Institute of Social Security
IPN	National Polytechnic Institute
KGB	Russian Committee for State Security
NCVS	National Crime Victimization Survey
NGO	non-governmental organisation
OAS	Organization of American States
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
ONS	Office for National Statistics
PGR	Republic's General Attorney's Office
PRI	Revolutionary Institutional Party
UN	United Nations
UNAM	National Autonomous University of Mexico
UNESCO	United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization
WH	Western Hemisphere
WHO	World Health Organization

## About the author

**Gonzalo Soltero** is an author and a professor at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) in León, Guanajuato. He has published six fiction books and several book chapters and journal articles on contemporary Mexican narrative, urban legends, social problems and cultural policy. He has been awarded a Newton Advanced Fellowship by the British Academy and has collaborated in diverse activities with the Mexican embassies in Great Britain, Austria, Russia and Iran. But he's not a spy.

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## Introduction

*They* are out there. Controlling us, the course of history and the way the future will unfold, even if we hardly notice their presence or doings and are unable to denounce them, much less stop their covert plans that define the outcome of our lives. But we know this. There are stories that warn us, that show their presence and alert us about the dark corners of reality and what lurks there: Jewish and freemason plots, Big Pharma, the New World Order, the military industrial complex, but also alien abductions for sexual experiments; crocodiles in the sewers of New York; razor blades in Halloween apples; pet owners who microwave their beloved animals while trying to dry them; conference attendees who fall prey to the charms of a beautiful seductress and wake up in a bathtub full of ice, with two slits on their lower back and no kidneys; despicable crimes committed against women and children in petrol stations, shopping malls, their parking lots and toilets. If you follow the stories, you can see all of it. You can see *Them* – so evidently hiding behind the scenes that who at this point doubts John F. Kennedy was killed by a conspiracy or 9/11 was an inside job?

A list of conspiracy theories and urban legends could go on and on. It seems practically impossible for anyone living with human contact not to have heard some of these stories and at least once wondered about their validity. Since the end of the past century, the study of conspiracy theories has been animated and fruitful. However, it has focused mostly on the United States and Europe, both as objects of study and centres of research activity. This book examines four conspiracy narratives from Mexico that push the boundaries of the field in a new direction. Mexico is a fertile terrain for conspiracy theories due to its complex social environment and its proximity to the United States, which not only made it a strategic platform during the Cold War but also today's land of bad hombres Donald Trump wants to fend off with a wall.

Conspiracy theories are always narrative in nature, telling us about the state of the world and the actors behind such conditions. This narrativity tends to be so enthralling that they have increasingly become the substance of entertainment and even politics. As popularly believed stories that explain the way of the world due to the schemes and actions of dark squadrons, they are sometimes closely related to certain rumours and urban legends that tell the modus operandi of evil men. Conspiracy theories have been addressed before by a number of perspectives, yet

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seldom have they been considered as what they essentially are: narratives, stories. By bridging the discussions of these conspiracy narratives, analysing them from a narrative standpoint and focusing on Mexico, this book contributes to a better understanding of these tales as well as why people return to them in different uncertain contexts and how they produce meaning.

Conspiracy narratives are currently thriving and spreading, perhaps more than ever, with the aid of technology, galloping on modernity and its discontents. An indicator of the growing influence of conspiracy theories in the world is how far we are today from what Daniel Pipes observed for the United States in 1999: ‘That several recent candidates for the presidency of the United States espouse conspiracism displays the prevalence of this mentality; that none of them came close to victory points to its limits’ (1999, 9). Since then we’ve had not only Donald Trump in the Oval Office but Andrés Manuel López Obrador in Mexico, Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil and a worrying etcetera of politicians known for expressing conspiracist views – worrying because they believe in them, rely on their instrumental value or both.

At the time of this writing, with the coronavirus pandemic at its peak, the outbreak has featured in a carousel of conspiracy readings. It has been denounced by Chinese diplomat Zhao Lijian as a US plot to mine the Chinese economy and geopolitical position, with the virus released into the country by the soldiers who visited Wuhan for the Military World Games in October 2019. On the other side, US senator Tom Cotton suggested the epidemic began with the leak of a Chinese biological weapon from a biosafety level-four (BSL-4) laboratory in Wuhan, China. Top Iranian leaders have also endorsed the narrative of a biological attack by a foreign power. In a video spuriously dubbed in Spanish, Vladimir Putin condemns it as a diabolical plan from other world leaders to decimate the world population. It has also been blamed on 5G technology. Amid conspiracy theory circles, the pandemic is seen as a stratagem implicating Bill Gates and Big Pharma, which will make a fortune from the vaccine. A Catholic bishop in Mexico said the pandemic was a cry from God because of abortion, euthanasia and sexual diversity. Similarly, one of Trump’s evangelical advisers declared gay groups were to blame for the ‘wrath of God’ (Sopelsa 2020). It has also been called out as a strategy from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to force more countries into debt, and Bolsonaro criticised it as part of a hysterical media campaign seeking to topple him. Meanwhile, the rumour or conspiracy theory behind the global buying spree of toilet paper has yet to be accounted for.

While postmodern theory declared not long ago the imminent end of grand narratives and the questioning of narrative itself, such debate has withered from the public sphere while narrative seems to be the very fabric of that sphere. The conspiracy theories about the coronavirus reveal a competition from very different players over the narrative of the pandemic in order to achieve political or rhetorical benefits. Propaganda, fake news, alternative facts and the expanding taxonomy of similar items pertain, in the end, to a narrative arena where the game is how the same events are represented according to the interests of one side or

the other. Furthermore, social problems and the policies devised to deal with them rely on their narrative construction.

This book discusses why narratives as conspiracy theories and urban legends about ongoing crime accomplish such a high suspension of disbelief among recipients, especially in Mexico, regardless of ethnicity, income or degree of education, investigating the sociocultural functions they fulfil. This contributes to what Michael Butter and Peter Knight set out as a research agenda in which theoretical perspectives should be tested in different places and times, within ‘the particular political, historical and cultural context in which they arise and gain meaning’ (2015, 21). A recent handbook edited by these two scholars points at the relevance of some of the areas the present book aims to cover and whose study is only beginning – for example, venturing into Latin America to examine recent conspiracy theories in Venezuela (Hooper 2020) or underscoring the importance of studying the verbal transmission of conspiracy talk along rumours and urban legends (Astapova 2020). Here I’ll follow similar stories into the Global South, which features prominently in some conspiracy narratives as the toxic backyard of the Global North, both in fiction and representations of reality. Conspiracy narratives warn that everything is going south, and the causes usually come from south of the border. If you browse through the tabloid press or your favourite streaming service, a gallery of bad hombres will greet you – villains frequently come from beyond frontiers and generally south of them.

Conspiracy narratives are stories about *Them* – bad hombres put the twist in the plot. A suggestion of their presence is sometimes enough to explain all the mishaps and misdeeds of society. They act as a collective Jungian shadow that gives randomness a pattern, purpose and meaning. Urban legends and conspiracy theories frequently have no or weak links with facts, but their cultural value is in how they produce and carry meaning. However, conspiracies are planned and executed, and evil squadrons do exist. Chapter 3, for example, examines the files of the Mexican secret police (DFS, Federal Directorate of Security), and this paper trail proves *They* indeed exist and sometimes act in mysterious way.

The research material of this book is formed by four conspiracy narratives. The first two concern Lee Harvey Oswald’s trip to Mexico a few weeks before the John F. Kennedy assassination, an event Peter Knight has termed the motherlode of conspiracy theories and the one that ‘has inspired more conspiracy thinking in America than any other event in the twentieth century’ (Knight 2000, 76). It turns out the magnicide was probably plotted south of the border during Oswald’s visit, or at least that is what the two accounts that will be examined regarding this trip suggest. Oswald’s expedition has some factual material of fertile narrativity, as he did meet with KGB (Russian Committee for State Security) agents in the Soviet Consulate, but these narratives affirm he also attended a twist party teeming with Castro’s sympathisers, had a Mexican Communist mistress and encountered a group of revolutionary students. Mexico is thus rendered as the dark global corner where JFK’s assassination was fixed and where the truth about it might still be found.

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The other two conspiracy narratives are urban legends regarding crime that became very prolific in Mexico through email between 2005 and 2007, later known as ‘Lights Out!’ and ‘Burundanga’. The former spread as a short email warning about a gang initiation rite. The aspiring gang members would drive in a car without lights. When another driver flashed its own lights as a signal, the gang car would turn around and kill all the occupants in the other car. The latter, ‘Burundanga’, warns about a substance used by criminals capable of subduing whoever smells or touches it, transforming the person into a zombie and erasing all memories of what happens during the trance. In the Mexican transmission of these crime legends, a sense of extreme anxiety and impending doom becomes evident. They function as news reports about an anonymous dirty war taking place on the streets and leave recipients with the distinct impression that the bad hombres may get them or someone close to them if they do not heed the advice carried in the message.

This research doesn’t look at films and novels but at the rumble, rubble and rabble of narrative: fictive non-literary stories that pretend to be true. Negative stories about others are among the tales that possibly predate every other narrative form. Robin Dunbar, for example, suggests that language evolved to allow our species to gossip in order to tighten social bonds (1993, 79). Storytelling is one of the features that makes us human and has accompanied civilisation from its beginnings. Narratives are present in the myths once told at night around the fire as well as in the answer to the question, ‘How was your day?’ They are a fundamental thread of social tissue, continuously weaving meaning to our everyday life. Narrative is not only a story or discourse but also a mental process crucial to comprehend reality – we grasp the world through narratives. It plays a constitutional role in how we structure our world vision and culture. The following dictum by Clifford Geertz reverberates like a leitmotiv through the whole book: culture is the ensemble of stories we tell ourselves about ourselves (2000 [1973], 448, 452).

Therefore, conspiracy narratives and their process of transmission will be analysed through an eclectic theoretical framework that incorporates conceptual tools developed by several disciplines, mainly narratology, the narrative turn, anthropology, sociology, history, cultural studies, risk analysis and folklorism. As knowledge advances increasingly faster in a wider set of directions, one of the contributions of interdisciplinary research is to find segregated arguments and put them together in a conversation they would have not joined otherwise, reaching new conclusions that would have been impossible to attain without such intermediation.

Regarding methodology, Butter and Knight suggest a comparative and trans-disciplinary approach to go deeper into cultural, historical and regional variations of conspiracy theories. They also propose more studies of these narratives ‘in the wild’ – in their endemic context – and through the process of sharing them to gain ethnographic detail and make comparisons across different times and places (2015). This is largely what this book intends to do, studying different conspiracy narratives that have circulated from the Global North to the South and vice versa,

finding in dissimilar countries the same plotting evil men, usually with very different interpretations.

The analysis of the research material is performed upon a qualitative basis, where the relationship between text and context is fundamental to perform a close reading of conspiracy narratives. The role of the media and popular culture as macro communicational processes in the shaping of perception is frequently considered to shed some light and compare it with micro-communicational processes, like word of mouth, its paper and electronic counterparts and even its institutionalised versions as national security intelligence. The present analysis of conspiracy narratives, mostly from Mexico, gathers specific insights about particular case studies that will contribute to the general discussion on the topic.

Conspiracy narratives are telling cultural phenomena precisely because of their ability to filter through different communities, incorporating regional details to become locally verisimilar and resist refutation attempts. They can push boundaries between fact and fiction, truth and belief; and play an important role in both binding and dividing human groups. Considerable attention will be dedicated to analysing why and how these narratives garner such credibility, looking at the links between texts, communities, otherness and meaning. Meanwhile, a more historical approach is also present, drawing from Mexican sources that were made available for the first time for this research and setting some records straight. This factual perspective is at times extremely relevant because of the degree of difference among possible interpretations from some aspects and angles regarding the representation and causality of past and current events.

Regarding the structure of the book, in the first chapter, I briefly review how conspiracy theories, rumour and urban legend research has been carried out in order to bridge their literatures and study. I also go through the origins of the 'narrative turn' in literary narratology and delve into narrative sensemaking: how narratives help us understand the world. The second chapter is dedicated to the current social context where conspiracy narratives proliferate. Different authors will be considered to gather several attributes that characterise this environment, such as immanent risk, ongoing crisis and social decline. Subsequently Mexico will be explored as an even more intricate maze of this labyrinth, aggravated by police corruption, mistrust in institutions and a growingly unbalanced distribution of wealth.

The third chapter focuses on Mexico as an international centre of intrigue during the Cold War where, as mentioned, two complementary conspiracy narratives about Lee Harvey Oswald's visit in 1963 suggest associations with Communists and spies. Unlike similar narratives these two have gained attention and verisimilitude over the years and have contributed to the emphasis of some authors on the possibilities of Mexico as the locus of hidden clues for JFK's assassination. This is the longest chapter of the book because of the expansive nature of everything connected to this magnicide and the considerable documental legacy of Oswald's transit through Mexico, which allows a rare vantage point into Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) operations.

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Chapter 4 features the two crime urban legends and details the method employed in their collection and their content, spread and aftermath. In both transmissions the text of the legends had a snowballing effect that attracted other narratives in its wake that were then incorporated into further emails – declarations of authorities, media reports and fragments from different websites that formed a palimpsest of increasing persuasiveness over disbelief. Thus, chapter 1 is about texts – what are they and how they will be understood; chapter 2 is about the context where they proliferate. Chapters 3 and 4 are about particular texts within their particular context, allowing a first textual-contextual analysis. However, the overall analysis of the cultural functions such narratives satisfy today continues in the following chapters.

In chapter 5 the analysis will be pursued through a close reading of different textual elements. Departing from Genette’s category of ‘paratexts’, regarding the texts in books which precede literary works, e.g. titles and prefaces, a paratextual analysis is applied to the subjects of the emails and the lines added by senders during transmission which precede the urban legends and allow for a textual digital ethnography. The role of authority, especially of sources, will be reviewed throughout this chapter, as it has profound implications on how these messages suspend disbelief and manage to become so prolific.

Chapter 6 continues the analysis of how conspiracy narratives provide an illusion of control to those sharing them – sometimes through magical thought – and how these narratives express social conflicts they ultimately seem to exacerbate rather than resolve. Chapter 7 explores a spectrum that begins with the frequent metaphorical role these narratives serve to the deep atavistic roots in human nature that make us sensible towards some aspects of conspiracy narratives. Lastly, in the conclusion, the main arguments and contributions of the book will be reviewed and appraised against conspiracy theories and rumours elicited by the coronavirus. Throughout the book the general hypothesis is that complex social environments foster stories that promote a particular perception of such environments in a narrative cycle that influences reality in which conspiracy and suspicion become the default filters in our frame of interpretation of everyday life.

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### 3 Oswald does the twist

Lee Harvey Oswald was in Mexico a few weeks before the shots in Dealy Plaza ended the life of US president John F. Kennedy and made Oswald's name known to the world. His stay in Mexico has been underscored by several authors as fundamental to unpacking the JFK assassination – and who and what were behind it. Gaeton Fonzi said that understanding this visit was ‘critical to solving the mystery’ (1993, 266) and ‘a key piece of the Oswald puzzle’ (1993, 278). In its final report, the Assassinations Records Review Board (ARRB), which was in charge of publishing a vast amount of confidential US government documents related to this event in the 1990s, said that it ‘remains one of the most vexing sub-plots to the assassination story’ (1998, 86). Shenon said that Mexico City was the one place where it was still possible to resolve some mysteries about the president's murder (2013, locs. 9447–48).

One of the reasons this very short trip is so particular and has garnered so much interest is that part of its soundtrack includes a rare historical noise: the CIA, that powerful, nearly infallible protagonist in many conspiracy theories, going ‘Oops!’ And more than once: Oops! We did realise that while in Mexico Oswald went to the Cuban and Soviet Consulates, the year following the missile crisis, but we didn't realise he posed any danger. Oops! Even if we had several photo surveillance operations trained on the Soviet and Cuban diplomatic missions, we didn't manage to get a single picture of him. We did send the photo of another man, whom, to this day, Oops!, we haven't been able to identify. We also had telephone taps in both consulates, and Oswald allegedly recorded speaking with members of both, but Oops!, we erased the tapes because we were short of supplies and storage space.

This rather atypical sound from the CIA comes from a station operating in a city of paramount geopolitical importance during the Cold War, as this chapter elaborates, that was repeatedly commended by headquarters in the same period. Inspectors reported that it was ‘the best in WH [Western Hemisphere] and possibly one of the best in the Agency’ (Goodpasture 1969, 39).<sup>1</sup> Its files garnered the same recognition (Goodpasture 1969, 52), and it had ‘one of the most extensive and expensive technical collection programs conducted by the Agency’ (1969, iv). Even J. Edgar Hoover, director of the FBI and not characterised by his sunny disposition, ‘used to glow every time that he thought of the Mexico City Station’

(Hardway and Lopez n.d., 164). Why did this very station end up sounding like Homer Simpson on a bad day?

This chapter focuses on two complementary conspiracy narratives about Oswald's visit that came out in the mid-1960s. Lee Harvey Oswald went to Mexico to obtain visas for Cuba and Russia. However, these stories suggest he was mingling with Communists beyond the paperwork of these bureaucratic procedures. One gives Oswald a Mexican mistress who took him to a twist party full of other sympathisers of the Cuban Revolution. The second puts him in contact with leftist students of the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), whom Oswald sought out on campus. Unlike similar narratives that emerged immediately after the assassination, these two have gained attention and verisimilitude over the years and contributed to the emphasis of some authors on the possibilities of Mexico as the locus of hidden clues to JFK's assassination.

For example, in 2013, during the 50th anniversary of the assassination, the Spanish newspaper *El País* directly headed a story, 'The Mexican Lover of Oswald', and the subhead continued: 'Kennedy's Killer Had an Affair with an Employee of the Cuban Consulate' (Monge 2013). The journalist Raymundo Rivapalacio declared more than once about this Mexican girlfriend as a fact (e.g. Aristegui 2017). Phillip Shenon stated the same, albeit slightly more cautiously (2017). Dan Hardway, one of the researchers from the US Congress House Select Committee on Assassinations (HSCA) who went to Mexico in 1978 and wrote a report titled 'Lee Harvey Oswald, the CIA and Mexico City' (better known as 'The Lopez Report'), attests to these narratives: 'There is now also evidence of Oswald's contacts with students at the National Autonomous University of Mexico and his presence at social events with Cuban Consulate employees' (2015).

This chapter briefly draws the context of Lee Harvey Oswald's visit to Mexico and outlines the known facts of his succinct sojourn, along with some of its grey areas, before dealing with the two aforementioned narratives. It looks into the factuality of both accounts but also into the role these stories seem to fulfil and the reasons behind their lasting popularity. An interesting aspect that emerges is that the narratives related to national security and intelligence, and the means through which they arise, are closely related to other narratives examined in this book, such as rumours and urban legends.

Oswald's visit to Mexico is studied here from a Mexican perspective for the first time. Some aspects of it have been lost in translation, covered by an intercultural white noise this chapter intends to help clear by dotting the i's and crossing the t's. One of the sources that makes this possible are the files of the Dirección Federal de Seguridad (DFS), which was in charge of large parts of the investigation of Oswald's transit and of handling its aftermath, by direct request of the CIA and the FBI in Mexico. These documents have been sought by authors and commissions like the HSCA. Peter Dale Scott asserts: 'Thus it is important that the ARRB recognize the substantive relevance of the DFS to the case. It should press for the release of the Mexican Government documentation of its investigation' (2013, 117). The index of public versions of the DFS Collection in the National General Archive (AGN) shows that some

of the files used in this book were made publicly available for the first time for this research.

Even if the main object of study in this chapter is the five days Oswald was in Mexico City, it's still imperative to edit things out due to the sheer expansiveness of most details related to JFK's assassination. I try to be clear enough for anyone newly approaching the subject and also try not to repeat some aspects of the visit that have been elaborated in detail by previous reports or authors. Accordingly, some sections are briefly sketched in order to go deeper into the ones that offer more potential for analysis. It is also important to note that as with almost every point regarding this topic, there are aspects and angles to Lee Harvey Oswald's trip to Mexico City that allow for all kinds of doubts and readings. Amid the historical traces from a world of covert action and deception, everyone sees what they will.

### **Cold War in a hot country**

Similar to the emphasis about the potential significance of Oswald's trip to Mexico is the underscoring of the importance of this country, and especially its capital, during the Cold War. According to Fonzi, 'It is impossible to overemphasize the importance of Mexico City in the "Spy versus Spy" games going at the time. It was the only place in the Western Hemisphere where every Communist country and every democratic country had an embassy, and it was a hotbed of intrigue' (1993, 266). At the time of Oswald's visit, it was also 'one of the most intensely surveyed spots on the planet' (Newman 1995, 352). Washington, declares Morley, saw Mexico as a battlefield: 'Mexico City became a labyrinth of espionage, a city of intrigue like Vienna or Casablanca with the spies of at least four powers angling for advantage: the United States, the Soviet Union, Cuba, and Mexico' (Morley 2008, 88).

This web of intelligence agencies and criss-crossing interests was also present in other countries of Latin America as part of the Cold War, covered by the Western Hemisphere division of the CIA. In 1954, for example, with the direct support of a covert operation, the CIA helped overthrow the democratically elected government of Jacobo Arbenz in Guatemala. Decades of civil war ensued with over 200,000 casualties. In what appears now as historical sarcasm, the CIA named it Operation PBSUCCESS. The triumph of the Cuban Revolution and its turn towards communism, 90 miles from the United States' coast, increased the political tension.

In the narration that opens the third volume of the HSCA Report, Robert Blakey, chief counsel, starts by pointing at the importance of Cuba during the administration of JFK: 'It prompted the occasion of his "darkest hour" – the aborted Bay of Pigs invasion [1961]. In the missile crisis, it also brought the United States – and the world – to the brink of a nuclear holocaust [1962]' (US House 1979a, 1). Although less visible, the covert skirmishes continued. In charge of this area of the CIA was Richard Helms, deputy director for plans at the time and later director of the CIA. He defined his former role as being in charge of overseas operations, like

conducting espionage, counterespionage and covert action outside the continental limits of the United States (CIA 1978; US House 1978, 6/110). When he spoke to the HSCA, he was very clear about this point: 'We had task forces that were striking at Cuba constantly. We were attempting to blow up power plants. We were attempting to ruin sugar mills. We were attempting to do all kinds of things in this period. This was a matter of American government policy. This wasn't the CIA alone' (US House 1979b, 125).

These operations included assassination attempts on political leaders. The HSCA looked at the possibility of Cuban involvement in JFK's murder; however, Blakey concludes that ironically what came to light was the opposite: 'Between 1960 and early 1963, the committee concluded, the CIA conspired with known documented underworld figures to assassinate Premier Castro' (US House 1979a, 1). Such assassination attempts are no conspiracy theory. The HSCA report includes Exhibit JFK F-527, approximately 25 pages excerpted from a report of the inspector general of the CIA detailing such plots. This provides a clear example of Knight's observation that one explanation for what seems to be increased conspiracy theories in recent decades is that more conspiracies have come to light, which justifies an increase in paranoia (2003b, 23).

Mexico was fair game for the bipolar powers behind the Cold War. As mentioned previously, the USSR had its first embassy on the American continent there in 1924. Goodpasture complains that Soviet officials could move freely in Mexico and covertly into the United States while Soviet agents there, some of them US nationals, used Mexico both as a meeting point with their case officers and as an escape route when fleeing from the FBI (1969, 15–16, 65–66, 141–42). The country was also a safer heaven for a large gallery of leftists – for example, in the 1930s Trotsky and the Spanish Republican exiles; in the 1940s Dalton Trumbo, Albert Maltz and others persecuted by McCarthyism; in the 1950s Fidel Castro, Che Guevara and the men who would achieve the Cuban Revolution; and in the 1960s, the topic of this chapter, their envoys and followers.

In this context, Cuba became of paramount importance for the CIA in Mexico. Goodpasture, the right-hand man of Winston Scott, legendary chief of the station for 13 years (1956–69), recounts how, when he returned from a Western Hemisphere conference in May 1960, 'the Cuban target was put at the top of the list for the Mexico City Station' (1969, 228). There were many reasons for this: 'Mexico was the only country in Latin America which had continuous diplomatic relations with Cuba from the time Castro assumed power' (Goodpasture 1969, 224), and in those years, 'the only method of transportation linking Cuba to the outside world was the weekly flights on Mexican and Cuban airlines' (Nechiporenko 1993, 84). With such a politically ambiguous southern neighbour and a shared porous border of over 3,000 kilometres between them, the United States was not keeping its distance. For this world scenario, it rekindled and polished the 19th-century Monroe doctrine, usually summarised as America for the Americans but generally understood and enacted as America, the continent, for the Americans, the dwellers inhabiting its penultimate northern country.

The Cold War was fought more with ideological than metallic ammunition; therefore, one of its fields was artists, intellectuals and their endeavours. They were granted strategic importance in the overall struggle just when television was beginning to catch on and decades before the Internet and social media. According to Iber both the United States and the USSR ‘assumed that intellectuals would play important roles in influencing public opinion and form the vanguard of social change’ (2015, 2); thus, in Latin America, ‘Progressive left-wing authors and artists from the region were said to be unusually close to political power’ (2015, 1). The first operational directives of the CIA mission in Mexico, formulated in 1954, included counteracting overt and covert Communist activities and promoting pro-US sentiments in intellectual and cultural circles, both in Mexico and, when possible, throughout Latin America (Goodpasture 1969, 223).

In order to fulfil those objectives, and in addition to what was mentioned previously, the Mexico CIA Station increased its capabilities. By 1964, the number of Mexicans employed as agents by the station was about 200 (Goodpasture 1969, 49). This locally outsourced intelligence staff included people from the whole spectrum of Mexican society, from mechanics, a housewife and the quarterback of the national university team involved in surveillance activities to some of the highest echelons in power. Among the many programmes, operations and assets, all with cryptograms beginning with *LI*, one of the most fruitful for the CIA was LITEMPO, a liaison operation with Mexican authorities to gain and exchange information, which ‘provided for operational support and security backstopping for the Mexico City Station operations from 1960’ (Goodpasture 1969, 418). The programme started with the approval of the Mexican president, Adolfo López Mateos, and the main link was with the Secretaría de Gobernación, equivalent to a Ministry of Interior or State Department. Most of the legwork was provided by the DFS.

LITEMPO became an intelligence and power structure for both countries. Due to the nationalism that came with the 1910 revolution and was used as an ideological scaffolding for all the governments after it, it was not appropriate for the president to meet officially with the ambassador of the United States. John Whitten, alias Scelso, chief of CIA covert operations in Mexico and Central America in 1963, declared later to the HSCA that this created a particular situation ‘whereby the Mexican President’s primary contact with the U.S. government was through our Chief of Station rather than through the Ambassadors’ (Hardway and Lopez n.d., 47). As Morley mentions, due to this arrangement, Scott became a sort of proconsul between the two countries (2008, 83). This relationship became an unofficial channel for the sharing of sensitive political information each government wanted the other to receive outside public protocol exchanges (Goodpasture 1969, 382).

Some Mexicans associated with LITEMPO received considerable political dividends. The scheme consolidated Secretaría de Gobernación as the ideal final step in public service prior to the presidency. As Goodpasture observes, all but one of the nine presidents of Mexico between 1928 and 1969 served as ministers of this institution prior to their election (Goodpasture 1969, 374). Even if the DFS was in

charge of all the dirty work, there were also benefits for the agents involved – most notably for an important protagonist of what follows, captain Fernando Gutiérrez Barrios. He was subdirector of the DFS when LITEMPO started and later its director, undersecretary and secretary of Gobernación, senator and governor of the state of Veracruz, where he was born.

The DFS, however, was not precisely an elite unit. Goodpasture, who worked directly with them for years, defined them as: ‘a hip pocket group run out of the Ministry of Government. . . . Their agents were vicious, venal, corrupt extortionists’ (CIA n.d. (b), 12/104). That’s three very negative adjectives before ‘extortionists’ from a seasoned CIA case officer at a time when the agency ran assassination and sabotage missions against other countries. She also declared: ‘The early days of the DFS were marked by illegal arrests, killings, detentions, extortion, blackmail and outright thievery’ (Goodpasture 1969, 375). In its later days, the DFS would only become worse – bad hombres, indeed. Most DFS agents were used more as blunt instruments than intelligence assets – for the CIA, they were local muscle with a *charola*, a badge that allowed them to do whatever they wanted with impunity.

The expression ‘bad hombres’, however, was originally used as a proxy for explaining a complex world in two words, and it is important to note that the Cold War was full of hues and nuances. Pettiná underscores that even if the origin of this clash was bipolar, the Latin American social actors involved had margin for agency, adaptation and sometimes advantage (2017, locs. 124–250). Many of their actions took place in ethical sewers, and there were plenty of lackeys complying to all whims from the US, but there was also some skilful manoeuvring in this political and ideological minefield. Gutiérrez Barrios was Scott’s Mexican right hand, but previously he had captured Castro and his men in Mexico and let them go, remaining a close and amical ally. He received a second salary in US dollars for years and a supply of Cuban cigars directly from Havana until he died. In the same year of the events in this chapter, president López Mateos, who sanctioned Scott’s role as proconsul, took a grand tour of the Eastern Bloc, meeting with Josip Broz Tito of Yugoslavia and Józef Cyrankiewicz of Poland and granting them the Order of the Aztec Eagle, the highest award to foreigners for prominent services rendered to the Mexican nation.

However, while some of the highest Mexican officials in charge of national security were on the CIA payroll, Mexico was also part of an ongoing defiance (largely performative) by being one of the few countries (and the only one in Latin America) with embassies from most Communist countries – this when, as Goodpasture makes clear, the economic gains from relationships with the Soviet Bloc countries were, at most, marginal (1969, 142). And every now and then, as this chapter allows us to see, Mexican officials ended up leaving the gringos between a rock and a hard place.

A final thing should be mentioned about this particular moment and field. James J. Angleton, top counterintelligence officer at the CIA since its creation and until his retirement (his middle name was Jesús, from his Mexican mother’s side),



characterised the intelligence world as a wilderness of mirror, after a verse of T. S. Eliot. This frequently quoted definition remains even after decades of inquests from committees and historians. A good example is one of the most important CIA documents about Oswald's trip: the Mexico City Chronology (CIA n.d. (a)) – the documental spine of what went on in Mexico from the point of view of the local CIA Station.<sup>2</sup> Morley attributes its authorship to Goodpasture: 'Over the next few months, she read everything in the station's files on Oswald, compiling a chronological summary of all important information. Eventually, the document ran to 133 pages of legal paper' (Morley 2008, 245).

The runner-up for authorship credit is Raymond Rocca, Angleton's deputy, to whom John Newman attributes this document. When elaborating their report for the HSCA, Hardway and Lopez seemed undecided about this, putting down Goodpasture in earlier drafts but going for 'Rocca Chronology' in the final version (e.g. Hardway and Lopez n.d., note 555). Both possible authors were questioned about this point.

MR GOLDSMITH: Do you know Anne Goodpasture?

MR ROCCA: The name is familiar and I must have met her.

MR GOLDSMITH: She was a case officer in Mexico City working with Win Scott.

MR ROCCA: She wrote that wonderful summary –

MR GOLDSMITH: Which summary are you referring to?

MR ROCCA: – of the case of all the file. It's a thick collection which summarizes every document in the Mexican file.

(HSCA 1978c, Interview of R. Rocca, 279)

And this is Anne Goodpasture's version of the same chronology:

A: This document, I think, contains a series of extracts made by Mr. Rocca, I believe, of the CI Staff, from documents which were in the Mexico Station file of Oswald.

Q: Did you have any involvement in the compiling of this document?

A: No. I saw this after it was already done, and I did make some notations on some information in here that was not correct.

Q: I see. What about the marginal notations on the left side of each page?

A: No. I didn't have anything to do with that. I don't know about it.

(HSCA 1978b, 73–74/114)

We have both possible authors on record in front of a senatorial committee acknowledging the document but denying authorship and each attributing it to the other. This helps show how thin the ice on which we are about to tread. We have something concrete – the answer to the question 'Who did this?' – refracting from different angles and eluding us in front of our eyes, remaining apocryphal. As a postcard to sum up the world of intelligence amid the Cold War, it wouldn't be the worst.

**Oswald's visit**

Lee Harvey Oswald spent five days in Mexico City, there was more than one Oswald in town or he was never there, depending on which account you follow. Likewise, he was there alone for two bureaucratic procedures and failed in both or had a lively amorous and social life surrounded by Communist comrades.

What he did on Friday and Saturday morning of the five days he spent there (if we grant he was there) is known and more solidly sourced, upon information from the DFS, FBI and CIA, along with witnesses from the opposite side of the political spectrum, the Cuban and Soviet diplomatic missions, that have testified about meeting Oswald. Even if some aspects may be questioned, the events of those two days are usually agreed upon in the work of the HSCA and different authors who dealt with the Mexican visit (e.g. Morley, Newman, Shenon, Simpich). According to this version, Oswald arrived in Mexico City on the morning of Friday, 27 September, and left very early on Wednesday, 2 October 1963. Contrary to the first day and a half of his stay, his whereabouts and activities for the remainder of his visit (three and a half days) are mostly unaccounted for.

On arriving in Mexico City, he got a room in Hotel Comercio, which was close to the bus station. His DFS file includes the hotel's registry with his signature, which later was confirmed as Oswald's handwriting by the FBI (CIA n.d. (a) 302, 64; Warren Commission 1964, 593; AGN 2017). After that he set out to pursue what seem to be his main objectives in Mexico – getting visas to Cuba and the USSR (AGN 2017). In the Cuban Consulate, he dealt mostly with Silvia Tirado Bazán, who worked as consular secretary. Silvia was a Mexican supporter of the Cuban Revolution and at the time married to Horacio Durán; hence she is mostly referred to as Silvia Durán. Oswald went to the Cuban Consulate two or three times on Friday, 27 September.

That day Oswald also spoke personally with two members of the Soviet consular section who were also KGB officers: first was Valery Kostikov, who then sent him to Oleg Nechiporenko, who later authored a book about his encounter with Oswald. His narration provides the inside version from this consulate, where Oswald was told his visa would take at least four months (Nechiporenko 1993, 70). Nevertheless, Oswald went back to the Cuban Consulate (a couple of blocks away) and said he had been granted the Soviet visa. Silvia called the Soviet Consulate and was phoned back and told this was not so (CIA n.d. (a) 2 and 3, 1–2). Oswald became angered and had an argument with the outgoing consul, Eusebio Azcué, and the incoming one, Alfredo Mirabal, took a look at him from his office. However, his transit visa was processed and later declined. Silvia gave Oswald her name and telephone number at the consulate. The depositions of these three Cuban employees to the HSCA, Silvia's additional interrogation by the DFS and the CIA transcripts of these consular calls confirm this much.

On Saturday, 28 September, the Soviet agents were gathering in their consulate to play volleyball between two *rezidenturas*, the operational bases of the KGB and GRU (Russian Main Intelligence Directorate, or military intelligence; Nechiporenko 1993, 75). The line-up indicates there were at least a dozen Soviet



intelligence officers in Mexico at the time. The chief of the consular section, Pavel Yatskov, was changing when the sentry told him there was a visitor. Yatskov told him to allow Oswald in. Kostikov arrived shortly after, and Nechiporenko eventually showed up. Oswald repeated his need for a visa and showed his documents and a gun he had to carry for his protection (Nechiporenko 1993, 77–78). When he was told again that an instant visa was not an option, he left the consulate and took with him all certitude of how and with whom he spent the remainder of his trip.

### Hearing silent voices and misplacing mystery pictures

Some of the most baffling aspects of Oswald's travel through Mexico begin shortly after he left the Soviet Consulate. The hypothesis of this chapter is that several actions that he didn't carry out have been attributed to him. These begin with the recording of conversations he didn't have and photos of a mysterious man the CIA said was Oswald, although he clearly was not, and whose identity to this day remains a mystery.

Both of these – the tapping, recording and transcription of telephone conversations and the photographs taken of people who accessed the socialist diplomatic compounds – were part of the many surveillance operations carried out by the CIA in Mexico, some of them liaising with the DFS (e.g. LIENVOY) and some carried out unilaterally (e.g. LIEMBRACE, LIEMPTY, LIFEAT, LIONON, etc.). Other works dedicate entire chapters to describing these programmes and how they worked due to their variety and complexity (e.g. Hardway and Lopez n.d., Simpich), so I only mention them succinctly.

Shortly after Oswald's departure from the Soviet Consulate, an incoming call was taped by the CIA. The woman said she was Silvia Durán from the Cuban Consulate and stated that a man wanted to talk to them (CIA n.d. (a) 4, 2). According to Boris Tarasoff, the transcriber of these calls for the CIA, there were two follow-up calls from the same man on 1 October (CIA n.d. (a) 5–6, 3; Newman 1995, 364) and another phone conversation attributed to Oswald on 3 October (CIA n.d. (a) 7, 3). The man calling, who could barely speak Russian, identified himself as Lee Oswald and mentioned he had previously been in the Soviet Consulate (CIA n.d. (a) 4–7, 3; Hardway and Lopez n.d., 74–79). All Oswald's entries and exits from these diplomatic compounds provided the CIA several opportunities to get his picture – ten, by the count of the HSCA. Three photographic bases were focused on the Soviet Embassy alone (HSCA 1978b, 15).

After Oswald was arrested in connection with Kennedy's assassination on 22 November 1963, the photos obtained by the CIA in Mexico were delivered to Dallas (CIA n.d. (a) 22, 5). The tapes of the phone conversations were also required (CIA n.d. (a) 27, 5). As Summers sums up: 'The CIA had sent to Dallas both a picture and a sound recording of the man its surveillance had picked up using the name "Lee Oswald" – and neither picture nor tape matched the Oswald under arrest' (Summers 2013, 335). The morning after the assassination, Edgar J. Hoover stated in a phone conversation to the freshly sworn-in president, Lyndon

Johnson: ‘We have up here the tape and the photograph. That picture and tape do not correspond to this man’s voice, not to his appearance. In other words, it appears that there is a second person who was at the Soviet embassy down there’ (Hoover-Johnson, 23 November 1963 in Bradford 2002). Paradoxical as it may seem now, it was the director of the FBI who first suggested there was more than one Oswald.

All the tapes that held the voice of someone pretending to be Oswald were allegedly erased for reuse. There is evidence that those tapes existed and were heard by researchers from the Warren Commission who went to Mexico in 1964 (Newman 1995, 325; Summers 2013, 337). Something similar happened with the photographs. Two former CIA officers, Stanley Watson, deputy chief of station with Winston Scott, and Joe Piccolo, from the Cuban section, described to the HSCA a picture of Oswald they had seen (Newman 1995, 224–36; Morley 2008, 179–80). So here we have a CIA Station at its acme floundering and tripping over itself. Oswald, the presumed killer of the president, had walked repeatedly into its intelligence crosshairs, but the evidence they sent was about somebody else.

Silvia Tirado denied seeing Oswald beyond Friday and making that call on Saturday (AGN 2017; US House 1979a, 51). None of the witnesses from the Cuban and Soviet Consulates who saw and spoke with Oswald put him on the phone – only US surveillance operations. If Oswald never called the Communist consulates, his voice wouldn’t be on the tapes, erased or not. Newman mentions that the acoustic evidence was suppressed precisely because the recordings didn’t contain Oswald’s voice (*Transcript of Proceedings* 1995, Tape 7). But if Oswald was not on the tape, who was? And why?

What probably happened here was that an espionage operation (counterintelligence impersonation – CIA assets pretending to be Oswald and Silvia) got caught in another espionage operation (telephone and photographic surveillance). And then the CIA had to cover its tracks to protect their own sources and operations, some of which were covert and perhaps illegal. All this provides another instance of the wilderness of mirrors. Furthermore, the intelligence agencies’ operational parameters amplify the spectrum of possibilities of *what really went on*, the verisimilitude of narratives about such events and their possible readings. The answers to the questions of who the impersonators were and what they were up to can only be tentative – and usually conspiracy based: *They* were there. *They* carried out an operation, covert to this day, but their agenda, motives, identity and affiliation can only be conjectured.

### **The aftermath of the visit**

The day after Kennedy’s assassination, Win Scott asked Gustavo Diaz Ordaz and Luis Echeverría, secretary and undersecretary of Gobernación, to arrest Silvia Tirado immediately and hold her incommunicado (CIA n.d. (a) 31, 7; CIA n.d. (a) 36, 8). The note to Echeverría mentioned that Silvia worked at the Cuban Consulate and had put Oswald in contact with the Soviet Embassy. It also provided several addresses: her own as Bahía de Morlaco 74, her mother’s in Ebro 12, and her

brother-in-law's: Herodoto 14 (CIA n.d. (a) 31, 7). As Silvia herself mentioned in one of the calls with the Soviets recorded by the CIA on 27 September, she had recently moved, so she no longer lived in Bahía de Morlaco 74 (CIA n.d. (a) 2, 1).

Headquarters reacted adversely to this move because it showed overt interference in foreign policy and could complicate international scenarios, especially US government freedom of action on Cuban responsibility (CIA n.d. (a) 51, 10). As it was too late to abort the arrest, Karamessines, the CIA's recently appointed assistant deputy director for plans, sent a capitalised cable insisting on this point and that no information about it should be made public (CIA n.d. (a) 51, 10). Scott sent another note to Echeverría asking specifically to have no information published or leaked (CIA n.d. (a) 46, 9). Scott added in a note what he had learned from Echeverría: that Silvia had been arrested along with seven others, including her husband, and that they were having a fiesta (literally in the memo). Echeverría also added that the Mexican president had sanctioned the arrest and said: 'Proceed and interrogate forcefully' (CIA n.d. (a) 46, 9) At 6 p.m. Echeverría told Scott the interrogation was underway and promised to try to keep the arrest secret (CIA n.d. (a) 47, 9).

However, on Monday, 25 November, the information about Oswald appeared on the first page of the newspaper *Excelsior*. The CIA was bewildered by this leak, as they had greatly insisted on in preventing it. In a memo that same day, the Mexico Station mentioned that the source of the leak could be Gobernación (CIA n.d. (a) 73, 15). This is likely, although the motivation behind it is another enigma. In any case, this small act of insubordination provides an example of the margins of flexibility and agency different actors had during the Cold War.

The irruption on the same day of a Nicaraguan, Gilberto Alvarado Ugarte, who claimed to have seen Oswald in the Cuban Embassy receiving money, complicated things further. Alvarado stated that on 18 September he had been in the Cuban Embassy and had seen Oswald taking \$6,500 from a black man with red hair and overheard him speak about eliminating someone (CIA n.d. (a) 82, 18). He met with US Embassy staff, and the Mexico City Station asked its equivalent in Managua for information about Alvarado (CIA n.d. (a) 92, 21); Alvarado eventually declared he was on a penetration mission for the Nicaraguan Secret Service (CIA n.d. (a) 96, 21; CIA n.d. (a) 98, 23).

The US Embassy (Thomas Mann), the CIA (Scott) and the FBI (Clark Anderson) in Mexico suggested they should inform their Mexican contacts about Alvarado and perhaps put him in their hands. Mann believed in a Communist plot and said Silvia Tirado should be rearrested, interrogated and confronted with Alvarado. The terms and tone were very clear: 'Tell Silvia she only living non-Cuban who knows full story and hence in same position as OSWALD prior to his assassination; her only chance for survival is to come clean with whole story and to cooperate completely' (CIA n.d. (a) 97-2, 22). The document also stated Silvia should not be allowed to leave the country and said Mexicans 'should be asked to go all out' until Silvia broke (Morley 2008, 221). This amounts to the US government rivalling the DFS on brutality by issuing a death threat and requesting that Mexican authorities torture a Mexican citizen on Mexican soil.

That night Echeverría was asked to put Silvia Tirado under surveillance (CIA n.d. (a) 101, 23).

On 27 September, the Managua Station confirmed that Alvarado had been an informant of the Nicaraguan Security Services until August 1963, when he had been discovered by the National Liberation Front (FLN; CIA n.d. (a) 116, 25–26). On a similar turn to the *Excelsior* leak, CIA headquarters emphasised that Silvia Tirado should not be arrested (CIA n.d. (a) 118, 26); however, Echeverría told Winston Scott she was already in custody, allegedly because she was planning to escape to Cuba (CIA n.d. (a) 121, 26–27). Echeverría later denied to the FBI having any evidence about this attempt to flee to Cuba. The memo states US officers' exasperation: 'We do not know which Echeverria statements are accurate' (CIA n.d. (a) 126, 28).

By 28 November, it seemed the Mexicans were regretting the detention of Silvia Tirado and wanted to let her go (CIA n.d. (a) 140, 31). This was very likely to come from a complaint note the Cuban foreign minister had handed the Mexican Embassy in Cuba, which rejected it because of its harshness – probably it hit too close to the bone. It declared that Silvia Tirado had told Cuban ambassador Hernández Armas that she had been 'held in prison until midnight, physically mistreated, and subjected to insinuations about alleged "intimate relations" with OSWALD'. The note declared these actions violated the minimum guarantees owed to diplomatic employees (*Discussions*, 94/153). As CIA headquarters had feared, this was turning into an international scuffle.

When the release of Silvia Tirado seemed imminent, the delivery of Alvarado became a pressing issue in order to confront their accounts about Oswald's visits to the Cuban consulate. A CIA Nicaraguan asset called ERYTHROID-3 (equivalent of the LITEMPOS in Mexico), who knew Alvarado and his activities as informant, was on his way and would help question him (CIA n.d. (a) 147, 33). By then the CIA was suspicious that Alvarado's story was another fabrication, like the many that had flooded them and other agencies regarding the JFK assassination. Everything in his testimony could have been nurtured from the press (CIA n.d. (a) 151, 34). Preparing the ground for the interrogation, they recommended: 'In securing confessions of fabrication, a sympathetic attitude, stressing awareness of the severe mental strain the subject must be under, and with generous recognition of his "basically fine motivation" coupled with promises of face-saving secrecy' (CIA n.d. (a) 151, 34). It seems the suggestions didn't find their way to the DFS, to whom Alvarado was finally delivered (AGN 2017).

Fernando Gutiérrez Barrios (LITEMPO-4) was put in charge, and on 29 November he reported to the CIA Station that he doubted Alvarado's story and would begin work to break him (CIA n.d. (a) 166, 37). Alvarado's deposition in the DFS files shows a very interesting transition. It is 11 pages long, and on page 10, after giving a very detailed exposition of the aforementioned story with Oswald and the red-headed black man, he 'spontaneously and after reconsidering it, wishes to declare' that the man he has referred to in his declaration as Oswald looked like him 60%, and after the assassination Alvarado tried to use such resemblance to rally the US government against Fidel Castro (AGN 2017). The deposition

finished shortly after on the next page and is signed by Gutiérrez Barrios, two witnesses and, in the margin of every page, Gilberto Alvarado Ugarte.

This is a remarkable epiphany of candidness or truly efficient interrogatory techniques by the DFS. It seems headquarters suspected foul play because they asked how the confession was obtained, which tactics were used by Gutiérrez Barrios and if there were threats or promises. It also directly asks: ‘Was ALVARADO physically mistreated? Much?’ (CIA n.d. (a) 180, 39). Here it’s probably suitable to reproduce a joke Peter Dale Scott told in a conference between US authors and former Cuban intelligence officers that portrays well how justice works in Mexico:

There was a murder and the story went out that a rabbit had committed the murder. And British Intelligence went in search of a rabbit and they came back in 10 minutes with a rabbit, but he denied committing the murder. And the French Intelligence was given the same challenge. They came back in 5 minutes and the rabbit said, “I committed the murder.” And they also asked the DFS to find the rabbit. And they came back in 2 minutes, with an elephant. And so they said, “no, not an elephant, we want a rabbit.” And the elephant said, “I’m a rabbit, I’m a rabbit, I’m a rabbit!”

*(Transcript of Proceedings 1995, Tape 7)*

Other CIA reports mention that Alvarado was threatened with torture ‘in a particularly barbaric manner’ (*Oswald 201 File, Vol. 17, 83/161*), interrogated with extreme duress (CIA 1964, 20/21) and mentally mistreated (CIA n.d. (a) 190, 41). When Alvarado spoke with ERYTHROID-3, he told him he had changed his story and signed the deposition because the DFS had threatened to hang him by the testicles (CIA n.d. (a) 190, 41). So he was willing to be the rabbit if necessary. For further certitude, the CIA arranged a polygraph to be sent to Mexico along with two experts (CIA n.d. (a) 195, 42). The result was the same: Alvarado’s story with its red-headed black man and a bespectacled Oswald was a fabrication.

Silvia Tirado was interrogated with questions furnished by Winston Scott and checked by FBI’s Clark Anderson (CIA n.d. (a) 156, 35; 255, 53). The US government was very adamant that she should never be in contact with any US citizens, with Mexican authorities taking the full responsibility for her arrest and questioning (CIA n.d. (a) 121, 26; 141, 31). Even if conspiracy intentions have been read behind the plausible deniability sought by the United States, this is exactly what the Mexican government wanted to save face regarding national sovereignty. Tirado was released on 29 November. She never returned to her job at the Cuban Consulate after her second interrogation.

### **The Mexican side of the story**

Most of the documents quoted so far come from the United States, and Silvia Tirado, as usually in most JFK literature, has been a very secondary character. The focus now shifts towards the Mexican sources to let them speak at length.