



DANIEL PEARL AWARD

for courage and integrity
in journalism

Writing the Stories Cartels Don't Want Told

*In a Country
Where
Journalists Are
Sometimes
Killed, Daniel
Pearl Award
Winner Sandra
Rodríguez Nieto
Refuses to Back
Down*

BY PATT
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THE HACKED-UP BODY of a young newspaper photographer, just hired to cover social events, turned up in a street in a town in Northern Mexico.

Another newspaper photographer, this one working for the major daily *El Diario*, was murdered in 2010. And a reporter for *El Diario* was killed in 2008. Following the latter's funeral cortege, one of his colleagues said that he didn't want anyone to open his coffin at his funeral.

Amid the thousands of people murdered in Mexico during the violence of the drug cartels, at least a dozen have been journalists, and a dozen more journalists have gone missing. Newspapers have installed bullet-proof walls and windows.

Covering the drug violence is one of the most dangerous beats in the world. Rarely have these killings been seriously investigated—"carpetazo" is the word, filed away and forgotten. Even more rarely have they been solved.

Some newspapers have stopped carrying bylines on their stories about the drug cartels in an effort to protect their staffs. Others have stopped covering the story altogether.

That is not the case for Sandra Rodríguez Nieto, the recipient of the Los Angeles Press Club's 2013 Daniel Pearl Award for courage in journalism.

As Tracy Wilkinson of the *Los Angeles Times'* Mexico City bureau says

of Rodríguez Nieto, "She was one of a handful of reporters (almost all women) who courageously tried to cover the news in Ciudad Juárez at the time of its worst violence. She wrote about the bad guys, the cartels and gangsters, but also and more importantly, perhaps, the victims, people whose relatives were slain or went missing."

She also, said Wilkinson, covered "the scourge of 'femicides,' the killing of women that became infamous in Ciudad Juárez. She covered corruption and the failure of authorities to investigate crimes or protect the citizenry. These may seem obvious or even mundane topics, but the dangers of writing about them in a place like Ciudad Juárez are enormous."

Rodríguez Nieto's reporting led her to craft a victims' database that revealed that most of

the Juárez victims were young and poor, not drug cartel members, as Mexican officials claimed. Additionally, 98% were unarmed. And 97 times out of 100, their murders were never solved.

Rodríguez Nieto is part of a group of journalists putting the world on notice about the plight of Mexican reporters who are threatened, intimidated, kidnapped or killed—sometimes by drug traffickers and sometimes by local authorities.

Despite the inherent danger, Rodríguez Nieto also aids others trying to cover the beat. She has been an international



La Fabrica del Crimen (The Crime Factory).



Sandra Rodríguez Nieto is known for writing fearlessly about any problems concerning the government in Mexico, and even created a victim's database to prove how poverty has led many youth in the country to a street-life filled with drugs, crime and working for the drug cartels. Rodríguez Nieto holds a master's degree in journalism from the University of Texas at El Paso.

expert for visiting foreign journalists, offering advice and expertise about covering the bloody zone.

Her latest book is *La Fabrica del Crimen* (*The Crime Factory*). She was recently announced as the winner of a prestigious Nieman Fellowship at Harvard University, where she will study methods to develop sustainable online journalism with a focus on transparency and government accountability in Mexico.

Rodríguez Nieto is a fearless, one-woman encyclopedia on Mexico's drug cartels. She knows how the competing organizations operate and how they keep out of the reach of the law. Her work has been repeatedly recognized: In 2010, the Spanish newspaper *El Mundo* presented her with its "Reporteros Del Mundo" award for her work covering a conflict zone.

That same year, the *Los Angeles Times* named her a media hero for her reportage in one of the most dangerous cities on earth. She showed up for work every day, the story said, and in much of Mexico, that alone could be considered an audacious act.

She holds a BA and a master's degree from universities on both sides of the border. She received the Knight International Journalism award in 2011, and the John Peter and Anna Catherine Zenger award last year.

Rodríguez Nieto currently works for SinEmbargo.mx, but will be leaving for Harvard and the Nieman fellowship.

She is tireless and fearless, and she is this year's winner of the Daniel Pearl Award for Courage and Integrity in Journalism. 🇲🇽



In 2012, Rodríguez Nieto gave a book presentation at California State University, Northridge.

Jesús Araujo/El Nuevo Sol