

THE ECUADOR

HISTORY,
CULTURE,
POLITICS

READER



CARLOS DE LA TORRE AND STEVE STRIFFLER, EDITORS

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HISTORY, CULTURE, POLITICS

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Pancho Jaime

X. Andrade

The controversial independent journalist Victor Francisco Jaime Orellana, widely known as Pancho Jaime, or PJ, was born in Guayaquil in 1946 and assassinated there in September 1989. Today, people remember him as a rockero (rocker) and as a political activist. Some see PJ as either a puppet in the hands of populist leaders, or as the last truly honest, independent fighter for popular causes. Equally important, many see PJ as "un verdadero macho" (a true macho man), an honor conferred on him for the ballsy, personal flair with which he denounced political corruption. At the same time, Jaime is widely considered an example of a "style" believed to be common among working-class sectors, one characterized by vulgar, violent language and a disproportionate emphasis on sexual references. The anthropologist X. Andrade leaves it up to the reader to decide.

Pancho Jaime grew up in Los Angeles, where his family had moved in the early fifties as part of the first massive wave of Ecuadorian immigrants to the United States. Jaime, an observant Seventh Day Adventist, was proud of having been a Vietnam Veteran and a participant in the California hippie movement, details in his colorful life history that differentiated him from most of his readers and provided him with a certain status in Ecuador. He presented himself to his Guayaquil readers as a cross between a hippie and a working-class intellectual, appearing in caricature in his own magazines wearing jeans, t-shirt, baseball cap, flip-flops, round glasses, and a ponytail. At the same time, PJ built a bridge between himself and his working-class readers by underscoring his personal experience with poverty and oppression.

While in Los Angeles, Jaime worked an endless series of odd jobs, such as dishwashing, selling newspapers, and cleaning restaurants and service stations. Nevertheless, he earned a technical degree at a community college. In the 1970s, he got involved as the music editor of *L.A. Touch*, an adult magazine devoted to pornography and the hippie lifestyle. According to PJ, shortly after the beginning of his career as a journalist, his luck changed dramatically. He claimed to have found a large sum of money that he used to return to Guayaquil, where he lived for the remainder of his life.

Promoting rock music was Jaime's top mission on his return, and in so doing he acquired local celebrity. His knowledge of North American pop culture and his hippie experience became the symbolic capital that he exploited in the course of various enterprises. His first publications were devoted entirely to music and emerging bands. By the time PJ started criticizing the music industry for its discriminatory practices toward local bands, he had already toured with his own group, Texaco Gulf, and opened the city's first rock discotheque and "head shop." Jaime's notoriety spread further through his stint at a radio station, where he worked as a DJ under the professional name *La Mamá del Rock*.

Although the tone of Jaime's allegations against the music industry became increasingly virulent in the final issues of his early magazines, his jump to a more clearly political form of journalism was the direct product of a violent incident with local police. During November 1984, PJ was tortured and incarcerated. His torturers, government officers, made him eat both his hair and his paper and then broadcast a photograph of his bloody, disfigured face on national television. This episode occurred during León Febres Cordero's ultraconservative presidency, a time when Jaime had begun printing a tabloid, *Censura* (here translated as "Censured" rather than "Censorship," in reference to PJ's constant subjection to state terrorism). In the years that followed this episode, Jaime was on several occasions tortured by local authorities, kidnapped by government agents, and was even once illegally incarcerated for several months.

In defiance of his torturers' threats, to which he made frequent reference in his magazines, PJ spent the rest of his life speaking out. Throughout Febres Cordero's regime (1984–88) and the first year of the presidency of the social-democrat Rodrigo Borja (1988–92), PJ published approximately thirteen issues of *Censura* followed by twenty issues of *Comentarios de Pancho Jaime*.

Although the format of the publications gradually changed from that of a tabloid newspaper to a magazine, the main feature added over time was the use of crude caricatures instead of photographs. Advertising, always marginal, gradually disappeared altogether, although Jaime did occasionally publish propaganda from friends, and populist and leftist figures. The magazines were printed on cheap paper, the colored ink reserved only for the cover. They consisted on average of forty pages, which included approximately thirty articles and an editorial page about current political developments. Generally speaking, each page had at least one illustration, most often a single cartoon. Sometimes, articles were accompanied by reproductions of original documents, such as letters or certificates, offered as proof of the veracity of the contents. The small typesetting and crowded layouts created the impression of each page being packed with information. The saturation of space

was due in part to economic constraints, a limitation that Jaime frequently lamented in his writings. More importantly, the narrative structure itself created a space-consuming effect. For instance, entire pages were filled by only two or three paragraphs. Each paragraph was composed of several sentences, not necessarily about related topics, but that were somehow intertwined to form a continuous, single account. Jaime possessed a fair level of orthographic expertise, but his grammar and punctuation departed from the standard.

Estimating the numbers of readers is difficult. First of all, it is hard to determine the actual print runs. There are no laws in Ecuador that require even registered publications to disclose the number of copies sold, and Pj's magazines were never officially approved for open distribution. The estimates of the ex-collaborators I interviewed fluctuated between 8,000 and 18,000 copies, both impressive numbers in the case of Ecuador. Second, the circulation of the magazines increased as they were photocopied, borrowed, or transmitted via networks of gossip in public offices, educational centers, and neighborhoods all over the city. Although Jaime targeted local bureaucrats and politicians, and mostly male working-class audiences, the widespread consumption of his magazines suggests that there was a far more diverse readership that included male and female, upper- and middle-class readers.

Jaime's works were sold primarily in downtown Guayaquil, the financial and administrative center, as well as an important meeting place for all social classes. Members of a local association of disabled persons, who in the last few decades have dominated the selling of lottery tickets and newspapers, were eventually recruited to distribute the magazines at the height of the publication's popularity around 1987. Vendors advertised the magazines on the sly by whispering to potential or well-known clients as they passed by in the streets. Even to this day, Jaime's work retains a following among Ecuador's urban classes.