



DAVID BURNS—AP

A contract from Cali? Removing de Dios's body after a Mafia-style hit in Queens

MEDIA

A Rash of Media Murders

Foreign-language journalists are dying on the job

Johnny Césaire doesn't get around much anymore. The nightclubs and restaurants of Miami's Little Haiti hold little appeal for the host of Radio Pèp-la (Peoples' Radio), a Creole-language talk show sympathetic to exiled Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide. When Césaire does go out, he tries to make sure he's not alone. "The police told me, always have somebody with you," he says. "If somebody shoots you, maybe they'll see who did it."

But will they tell? More than two years after Césaire's on-air partner, Jean-Claude Olivier, was gunned down and killed leaving a nightclub party, police are still trying to put together a case against the man they say pulled the trigger. A few weeks later, a gunman shooting the same .38-caliber pistol killed Fritz Dor, 33, the host of three pointedly political talk shows broadcast to Miami's Haitian-exile community. Prosecutors believe the radio hosts were marked because of their passionate commentaries. Says Assistant State Attorney John Kastrenakes: "A big-time guy in Little Haiti wanted them dead."

Working in the foreign-language media has become one of the most hazardous jobs in journalism. According to a new report by the New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists, nine immigrant journalists have been killed on U.S. soil since 1982, each apparently in retribution for what he had broadcast or written. Most of the murders remain unsolved, and largely unsung by the English-language media. Says committee chairman James Goodale: "Unless

someone like us points out that this is an effort to silence the press, the cases go to the bottom of the pile."

One notable exception was the slaying last year of Manuel de Dios Unanue, 49, a Cuban-born writer and editor who wrote extensively of the Colombian drug trade's reach into his home base of Queens, N.Y. A hooded gunman fatally shot de Dios in the head, Mafia style, as he was having a beer in a Spanish restaurant. Perhaps because the shooting reportedly involved international drug dealers, or because a group of Latino journalists (and *Newsday*) kept the pressure on, New York and federal authorities conducted an intensive investigation that led to three arrests in May (all three denied the charges). Authorities say the alleged hit man was acting on orders of a cartel based in Cali, which may be linked to other drug murders as well. Even so, some papers needed prompting to see the importance of the story. "I got a call at 11 o'clock that night from a top editor—they didn't even know who de Dios was," says Juan Gonzalez, a columnist for the *New York Daily News*. "He'd only been the editor in chief of the major Spanish-language daily. There is a tendency to look at foreign-language journalists as sort of less than journalists."



AP

Silenced: *The editor*

Deadly exile politics has been the focus of attention in the killings of a series of Vietnamese émigré journalists. Lam Trong Duong, editor of a newspaper sympathetic to the Vietnamese government, was shot on a San Francisco street in 1981. Nguyen Dam Phong, publisher of a paper that had covered alleged fraud by Vietnamese government opponents, was fatally shot outside his Houston home in 1982. Magazine publisher Trap Van Pham was killed in a bombing in Garden Grove, Calif., in 1987. Nhan Trong Do, layout editor of a Washington-area Vietnamese paper, was shot in his car in 1989. And Treit Le, a columnist for the same paper, and his wife were killed the following year. None of those cases has been solved. But suspicions focus on far-right Vietnamese émigrés, who have a low boiling point concerning anyone they perceive as soft on Hanoi. Detective Al Butler with the Garden Grove Police Department's gang-intelligence unit insists that his unit isn't letting the Trap Van Pham case lapse. But he notes that three other homicides in the Vietnamese community took eight years to break. "If [the émigrés] don't know you, they're not going to tell you much."

At least one murder seemed to have ties to a foreign government. When Henry Liu, who wrote critically of the Taiwan government, was shot near San Francisco in 1984, the FBI swiftly stepped in. A Taiwanese émigré was convicted, and a general, an admiral and a colonel in the Taiwanese forces served prison terms on Taiwan for their involvement. The Lius' lawyer, Jerome Garchik, urges automatic FBI jurisdiction: "The media should lobby Congress to make the murder of a journalist on U.S. soil a federal offense."

But American journalists are killed so rarely in the United States—the last was Arizona Republic reporter Don Bolles in 1976—that gaining support for such a law would be difficult. And a double standard does seem to prevail. Bolles's murder prompted an unprecedented media probe, prompting a police investigation that won convictions of two Phoenix businessmen. By contrast, a similar car bombing in Miami just three months earlier that cost a Cuban radio news director both his legs still hasn't been solved. James Goodale thinks that it's up to journalists to keep the pressure on to crack such cases. There will be no shortage as more simmering disputes end up on these shores.

PETER KATEL in Miami