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There were no official remembrances of the Spanish Civil War on the op/ed page of the Los Angeles Times this year. Yet, there was an opinion piece on Guernica, the small town in the Basque region where German planes pioneered the bombing of a civilian population.

We remember Guernica so vividly and with such emotion in large part because of Pablo Picasso’s remarkable painting. As Fernando Botero, Latin America’s most celebrated living artist, put it “art is a permanent accusation.”

This semester the Center for Latin American Studies organized a display of Botero’s “Abu Ghraib” paintings and drawings. The New York Times has referred to the exhibit as “among Mr. Botero’s best work” and points out that “it is moving to encounter these large, unnerving images and austere compositions on American soil.”

The reviews do not fully prepare the viewer for encountering these paintings in person. They are passionate, intense, involving, sensual and deeply disturbing. Their visual richness leaves us no choice but to confront the demonic acts they portray. As Isabelle Allende wrote in the guestbook on opening night, “Thank you, maestro, for putting a mirror before our eyes.”

Isn’t Abu Ghraib a bit distant from Latin America? In a highly integrated, globalized world, it is all too close. Botero, a Colombian, has offered the first interpretation by a major artist of a signal event in the Iraq war; the war itself and Abu Ghraib in particular have weighed heavily on Latin American attitudes towards the U.S.; and, finally, two Latin American countries, Chile and Mexico, played a central role on the United Nations Security Council in the lead-up to the war.

The Center organized an extensive semester-long program, reported on in this issue, to engage and discuss the issues raised by the Abu Ghraib paintings. We were very pleased to welcome Fernando Botero and Sophia Vari, a critically acclaimed artist and the wife of Mr. Botero, to Berkeley to open the exhibit.

We began the program with “A Conversation With the Artist,” in which Robert Hass, a poet and Berkeley professor of English, spoke with Fernando Botero about these paintings in the context of his life and art. The second discussion, “Art and Violence,” examined the intersection of aesthetic issues and political questions and the third event engaged themes of “Torture, Human Rights and Terrorism.”

The exhibit could not have taken place without considerable support. When museums proved unavailable, the art was displayed in the main library of the university. Tom Leonard, the University Librarian, and Beth Dupuis, the Director of the Doe/Moffitt Library, through their energy and commitment reminded us why great libraries are central to democratic societies. Christopher Edley, the dean of Boalt Hall School of Law, was a vital part of the project, demonstrating once again his belief in civil liberties, openness and engaging the central moral and political issues of the day. As Dean Edley has commented, the paintings depict what happens when the rule of law is absent.

The Center staff and a multitude of volunteers seemed to do the miraculous. Individuals and foundations contributed generously to make this happen. And, finally, the ideals, spirit and history of UC Berkeley, the place where the Free Speech Movement was born, made this campus a special place for the first showing of these works in a public institution in the United States.

— Harley Shaiken

Class of 1930 Chair, Center for Latin American Studies
A Conversation With the Artist

On January 29, 2007, the Center for Latin American Studies opened the Abu Ghraib exhibit with a rare public conversation with Fernando Botero about his life and art. Robert Haas, a UC Berkeley professor of English who was Poet Laureate of the United States from 1995–97, spoke with Mr. Botero about issues ranging from the process of painting to his life as a young man in Colombia; from artistic influences on his work to how the Abu Ghraib paintings and drawings came to be; from light and shadow on the canvas to moral issues in the world.

Robert Hass: So, maybe we start at the beginning and ask how these paintings came to be?

Fernando Botero: The whole world was shocked by the revelation that the Americans were torturing Iraqis in the Abu Ghraib Prison. I read about it in the famous New Yorker article by Seymour Hersh. I was surprised, hurt and angry, like everybody. The more I read, the more I was motivated, angry and upset.

A few months later I was on a plane going back to Paris, and I read about this tragedy again. I took out paper and pencil and started doing some drawings. When I got to my study in Paris I kept drawing and painting. It became like an obsession. For 14 months, I was only working on this, thinking about this. At last I felt empty. I didn’t have anything more to say. For some reason I was at peace with myself.

But for months I felt this desire to say something because I thought it was an enormous violation of human rights. As I said before, the United States has been a model of compassion and human rights. That this could happen in a prison administered by the Americans was a shock. It caused great damage to this country. This morning I spoke with a journalist from Argentina, and she told me that only 6 percent of Argentines now approve of America. It was 70 percent three or four years ago.

I am surprised that more artists haven’t done something about torture because it is a big issue that won’t go away. It has to be remembered. I wanted to create a testimony to what happened. Of course I know I’m not going to change anything because I don’t have that power, but at least I can give a testimony of what happened. I couldn’t stay silent.
RH: I saw the paintings yesterday, and I thought about the American writer Flannery O’Connor talking about the American South in the years before the Civil Rights Movement. When people asked about her art she said, “For the hard of hearing you shout; for the almost blind you draw large and startling pictures.” I think you can tell from the audience here and from the thousand people lined up outside who didn’t get in how much you’ve spoken for those people against the kind of moral numbness that has set in.

FB: I tried to speak as clearly and loudly as I could. My approach to art allowed me to say things in a very direct way. I imagine that there are conceptual and abstract artists in America who cannot express themselves or be understood but who are also full of rage.

RH: You went to Mexico as a young man and saw the muralist painters and that tradition of painting about and for ordinary people. What effect did that have on you?

FB: I was born in Medellín, Colombia. It was a provincial town; there were no museums, no galleries, nothing like that. The first art I saw was the Rivera, Orozco and Siqueiros paintings that somehow came to Colombia. Then, of course, I went to Mexico to see everything.

What is important about the Mexican movement was that they made the reality of the country the subject of their art. Before that, it was not considered a worthy artistic subject. Art had to be about the aristocracy or some souvenirs from Paris. And then the Mexicans painted the poor people and the Indians and created this tremendous movement. That was an important influence when I started.

Later I went to Italy and saw the great masters that actually inspired the Mexicans, because the Mexican movement was inspired by Giotto, by Masaccio, by Piero della Francesca and Uccello. The language was imported from Europe, but they cared about Mexican reality, and that was a tremendous thing. Part of my formation was this influence, this direct way of speaking that I think is important.

Well, there were so many other things. I am the kind of artist who isn’t afraid to be influenced. I have had many, many influences that enriched my experience. My mind was full of images that would become transformed, later.

RH: Looking at the paintings last night, I was thinking it couldn’t have been easy to live in your mind with those images for 14 months.

FB: Of course it was not the same as when I do pleasant subjects. In art sometimes you have to make a parenthesis in your production to say something special about something that touches you. I am convinced that most art in history has been done on pleasant themes, but several times I have moved out of this line of thinking and done rather unpleasant subject matter.

You know for instance about the drama in my country. I spent two years working on paintings about the violence and narcotrafficking that was so terrible in Colombia. I donated those paintings to the Colombian National Museum because my country will be peaceful one day, and then people will see these paintings and remember how terrible, how stupid the violence was. The memory of it will not disappear.

In the sixties I did many paintings about dictators and military juntas because that was the reality of Latin America at that moment. Then I did many, many satirical things. And then I always go back to the eternal subjects of painting: the still lifes, the figures, the animals, because — what is art? — art is doing the same things but in a different way.

Art history is the history of people who saw differently. Not better, because in art there is no absolute truth; everything is truthful as long as it is coherent, as long as the artist has a tremendous conviction that touches everything he does. That is what he can give to art history: this vision that is different and coherent.

RH: You started by drawing on the airplane. When did you move from drawing to painting?

FB: Well, almost immediately. I got to Paris, I went to my studio and I immediately started doing drawings that were more elaborate, more constructed. Then after a few weeks, I started to paint in oil. That’s the way you do it. You have to do a lot of drawing before you actually think of going into the oil paintings.

RH: How long did you stay near the photographs?

FB: Well, I saw the photographs. They were very interesting as documents to know the atmosphere of the prison. This corridor, this light that was very dramatic — because most of the torture happened during the night. All this was very important. But there was no point in just taking a photograph and making a copy in oil like they did during the hyperrealist movement in America in the sixties. Well, that was an approach; in this case it didn’t make any sense.

What I wanted was to visualize the atmosphere described in the articles, to make visible what was invisible. Because the artist doesn’t have to be there; he can imagine the scene and
create something that has this power, as if it were actually an immediate vision of the thing. The concentration of energy and emotion that goes into a painting says more than the click of a photo. Of course I am partial to painting, but in art you have to concentrate so much energy that somehow people feel it. There is something truthful, and they feel it; they feel it.

RH: What was your process? How much space was there for revision and reflection?

FB: I have the same problem painting Abu Ghraib as painting a still life because the problem is coloring, composition, drawing — all the things that go into any painting. I start with a sketch that is usually done with great speed because it's like a spark of rage, a spark of anger. From the sketch I pass it to the canvas. I start to paint and to invent the painting. When I start, I know 20–30 percent of what is going to happen.

But then I follow the needs of the art, the needs of the painting, the color. The problem is that I have to create a continuity in the colors, a balance in the composition, that corresponds to my thinking. At the end, when I actually do the painting, it is very similar to every other painting.

Of course, if I am painting a sensual nude, it's another sensation. If I am doing something that is dramatic, then I have to convey this feeling of pain and anguish and humiliation. Then something I was thinking that day somehow gets into the painting, and people feel it.

RH: Last night people were talking about the use of color in the paintings. The red of course holds up the whole tradition of blood in Spanish painting: the Stations of the Cross, Goya's Disasters of War, all the San Sebastians and martyrologies that the paintings call up. It felt like you had to be aware of the echoes you were making once you started this process.

FB: Well, yes. I have been a painter for a long time, 58 years. You get a lot of information, in museums, in books, everywhere. You have this Christian tradition of martyrs and Christ and everything, full of blood, full of death. All this is in the back of your mind, and then you recognize that this was very present at the moment you were painting. But you don't realize it until you're done. When you are painting, you don’t realize it. Of course the color red was important because as I said, it is the same problem as in any other kind of painting: you have to take care of the color as much as if you were doing a landscape or a still life.

RH: Just in terms of the process: Does the paint have to dry for a while before you can go back with second thoughts?

FB: Well, yes. In painting there are two ways to do it. The Impressionist painters invented what is called direct painting in which you mix the color in the palette, you put it there on the canvas and that's it. Picasso, Matisse, Chagall, Braque all used this technique. Most of the art of the 20th century was done like this, direct painting.

The painters before Courbais, in the middle of the 19th century, worked in a process that was like building up a painting through coats and coats of paint. They worked like writers: you do something; you leave it; you read it again; you edit the text; you leave it; you correct this and that, and the thing builds slowly through layers of paint and corrections. I like to work like that. I don’t work in a direct way. I paint something; I let it sit for two or three weeks; I look to see if something is wrong; I repaint the whole thing and change this and that. I try to do the best I can, and that’s the way it is.
It takes a few months to do each painting, but it’s not as though I work continuously on it for three months. I work perhaps a week or 10 days total on a painting. But I don’t complete it the first time. I have to criticize it. I have to not let anything pass. I redo big parts of the painting, if necessary. I change things. That’s the way I work.

RH: So while one painting is set aside you might be working on another and discover something that would clarify what you were doing previously?

FB: Exactly. I work on five, six, seven paintings at the same time because I have to let them sit and dry for a few weeks before I take them on again.

RH: One of the powerful things about the moral imagination of the paintings is that, with one or two exceptions, we don’t really see the perpetrators of the violence. It’s very much about the victims. In fact most of what we see of the torturers is hands, gloved hands…

FB: And boots. One of the things in the photos that made the biggest impression on me was the fact that the guards were wearing these green gloves to touch the prisoners; I thought it was a terrible humiliation. It made a tremendous impression on me, this hand in a green glove touching the prisoners. I thought it was more powerful to give all the space to the victim and only leave the hand you see touching the prisoner. If I had to split the space it would be less effective than focusing on the victim and the hand or the boots.

RH: In the American context, the young people who carried out the torture — apparently at the encouragement of the CIA and U.S. military intelligence — were mostly poor white kids from the South: a girl who would do absolutely anything so the boys would like her; working-class guys who got jobs as prison guards, full of anger… They got punished. It was the American news media, as you have remarked, that exposed the violence, and some of the soldiers who carried out the torture were brought to justice. But none of the people who initiated the torture or created the nightmare atmosphere that you rendered have been punished for what they’ve done.

FB: You’re right.
“Hey, gordito! Time to lose some weight. As of next week, gorditos like you won’t be allowed on the buses or the metro anymore. You take up too much space!” goes a joke circulating around Santiago at the moment.

That is, among the people who are still capable of laughing. Mostly, though, the faces around the city are as long as the queues at the bus stops.

Santiago’s new public transportation system, the by now infamous Transantiago, has seriously shaken Michelle Bachelet’s government, just in time for its first anniversary celebrations. In fact, since it directly affects the everyday lives of at least one-third of the country’s electorate, it constitutes the most serious crisis that the Concertación, the coalition that so far has successfully governed Chile since 1990, has had to face.

What has gone wrong for President Bachelet?

Michelle Bachelet was catapulted into the public limelight when Ricardo Lagos appointed her as his minister of defense. Never had a woman held such a position in the Americas. Bachelet’s personal background meant that she was the perfect person for the job at the time. Soon, like the sorcerer’s apprentice, the relatively inexperienced Michelle Bachelet took off in Chile’s public opinion polls,
rather unexpectedly ending up as the governing coalition’s frontrunner for the presidency.

Things got slightly out of hand, however, during the first round of the 2005 presidential election campaign. It seemed Bachelet’s team of advisors lacked direction, coherence and, above all, political experience. It also became clear that the candidate herself was no strong leader. The apprentice’s broom was chopped in half during the first cabinet reshuffle — only 103 days after taking office — occasioned by a muddled (some critics say incompetent) handling of protests by schoolchildren, which brought thousands into the street and highlighted all the unresolved problems in Chile’s education system.

Several corruption scandals, a few mishandled political appointments, a reduced economic growth rate and a string of ministerial faux pas later, the sense in Chile this spring is that the government has lost control of the political agenda. In an attempt to reign in her brooms and close the flood gates, Bachelet again reshuffled her cabinet. In the absence of the old sorcerer, a new one was called in to clean up the mess: René Cortázar, the former labor minister of President Aylwin and an old hand at steering through a political storm, was appointed as the new transport minister and charged with sorting out the Transantiago.

Cortázar will indeed have to work some magic to resolve this crisis, but resolve it he must. Additional resources will be made available, more buses will be put on the streets and the system will be reorganized to stem the worst of the tide of discontent coursing through a population unused to having to hop onto two or three different buses and a metro instead of the one bus route used before. By the end of the year, the crisis will have been resolved. Santiaguinos will have got used to the Transantiago, and the government will most likely be dealing with other issues. Probably. Hopefully.

Nonetheless, the Transantiago crisis prompts several questions. The most immediate one is why this government seems so disoriented and inept compared to its predecessor.

When she campaigned for office, Michelle Bachelet promised Chileans a new leadership style, new faces in office, gender parity in the cabinet and a government for the citizens (gobierno ciudadano). New faces, however, also significantly reduce the stock of political experience. And in practice, the gobierno ciudadano seems to mean that the president and her ministers have distanced themselves from the political parties in their coalition. Although her cabinet nominations have respected the required equilibrium between parties, Bachelet did not necessarily pick those...
candidates the party leaderships put forward.

This is a president’s prerogative. But it is also a risk. Disgruntled coalition partners are unlikely to be cooperative. The somewhat choppy relations between the executive and its supporting parties have further weakened Bachelet’s position, despite her parliamentary majority. Most recently, a relatively straightforward legislative proposal for accelerated depreciation by her finance minister, Andrés Velasco, was voted down by a recalcitrant congress. This does not bode well for future legislative proposals, especially not for the more controversial ones such as the reform of Chile’s pension system.

Even after her second cabinet reshuffle, it is not clear that President Bachelet has put together the right team for the years ahead. As long as her brooms continue to sweep independently of each other rather than being reigned in to some sort of order, the sensation in Chile will be that of a government adrift.

Yet there are other explanations for why things are going wrong in Chile, too. After 17 years in office, one could ask whether the Concertación has simply been in power for too long. Are the niggling corruption scandals that seem to be dogging this administration as well as the last one a sign of the coalition’s complacency?

Personally, I do not subscribe to this point of view. It is always difficult to quantify corruption, especially in a developing democracy such as Chile’s. Is there really more corruption, or are we just more likely to find out about it? In any case, compared to other Latin American countries or even the present U.S. administration, Chilean corruption scandals seem negligible. More transparency is undoubtedly a good thing and will strengthen democracy in Chile. But it is not the root cause of the government’s troubles.

A more likely culprit is the binominal electoral system which encourages political infighting not only within the governing coalition parties but also within the opposition coalition. Chile’s election system means that parties are more likely to increase their number of representatives by taking votes away from their coalition partners than from the opposition. So while the pathologically divided rightwing opposition in Chile is clearly savoring the government’s misfortunes, it has thus far been unable to put together a viable alternative strategy.

This is not a healthy foundation for a functioning democracy. The fact that Bachelet’s government is weak and relatively undisciplined merely serves to highlight and exacerbate problems that have existed since Chile’s transition to democracy in 1990.

While Chile’s autopilot still functions (as always remarkably well compared to other Latin American countries), resolving the deeper structural issues that the country now has to confront requires much more than an autopilot. The Concertación has already undertaken what could be described as the “easy” or “obvious” reforms, meaning those that generate a relatively broad consensus and bring immediate results.

In the area of education, for example, participation in both elementary and secondary education has increased to levels observed in developed countries. However, in international tests of educational standards, Chile lags significantly behind other countries with a similar level of development. How does one now set about improving the quality of education? Above all, how does one provide young people with equal opportunities in a country with one of the world’s most unequal income distribution curves?

These questions are much more difficult to tackle (not least because they require taking on the teachers’ union as well as the opposition, which sponsors many private and subsidized educational institutions). They also throw up some fundamental concerns, such as whether Chile’s educational system is really able to produce equal opportunities given its current structure. Issues like these pitch the opposing sides of the debate into fierce battles based on ideological and historical premises, while yet another year passes without any real change; a year in which the gap in educational achievement between Chile and its
Asian counterparts, who have little time for ideological bickering and focus on practical results, is likely to widen.

Beyond this, there are even more fundamental issues at stake. Where is Chile going? Is the Concertación’s much praised development model sputtering? How much longer can Chile continue to generate the kind of economic growth it needs exporting only copper and a few other agricultural products with little added value? And what should be the role of the state in all this? Does the Transantiago crisis illustrate the need for greater state involvement in the provision of basic services, or does it highlight the state’s failure to provide these services efficiently? Perhaps the most controversial question of them all is whether the state can deliver the standard of living average Chileans are aspiring to given its limited tax revenues.

It seems less than likely that the current government will introduce these issues into the public debate, let alone tackle them. On April 22, Bachelet again laid out her vision of government. It is a good thing for presidents to have a vision of where they want to take their country. However, it helps if this vision includes concrete policy objectives. Vague aspirations such as “promoting more participative politics” in which the “citizenry takes on the role of protagonist” or constructing “a more inclusive society” are too abstract and hardly serve as a foundation for a serious policy discussion of the specific issues Chile has to face with regard to its future development.

One well-known analyst recently likened the country to a toad sitting in a pot of water that is gradually brought to the boil. While its politicians, intellectuals and policy makers are sitting around debating, they are missing the opportunity to jump before the water gets too hot.

I am inclined to agree. Having said that, I am not yet prepared to abandon hope for this presidential term. Michelle Bachelet has shown a remarkable capacity to regenerate her political capital. Chileans still like and broadly support her. If she can display the warm smile that got her elected often enough in public while simultaneously reasserting her leadership, improving relations with her coalition partners and allowing her ministers to put together a coherent political agenda, she may yet recoup some of the lost ground. But it will require no small degree of inspiration, direction and a good portion of political magic.

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Who Is the Latino Voter?

By Maria Echaveste

Republicans fanned the flames of fear over national security and terrorism to hold onto power in the 2002 and 2004 elections, framing the debate in terms of who would keep the nation safer: Republicans or Democrats. Issues like health care, the economy and education got pushed aside by the strength of the White House message machine even in the 2004 election, when serious questions concerning the war in Iraq were gaining traction.

By 2006, facing increasing disenchantment with President Bush’s conduct of the Iraq war, the Republicans tried to use a new version of the “who will keep you safe” strategy. This time, however, illegal immigration and the strengthening of the vulnerable southern border were to be the 3.0 version of the “war on terrorism” game plan. Yet being tough on illegal immigrants did not turn out to be the “Hail Mary” pass that galvanized the conservative base to save the Republican majorities in Congress. Instead, it may have actually added to the points scored by Democrats with another part of the electorate — Hispanic voters.

But before Democrats can take the Hispanic electorate to the bank every election day, they need to do a better job of counting the votes. With respect to the real and perceived increase in Latino support in 2006, Democrats need to crunch the numbers and try to understand how the issue of illegal immigration played in Hispanic communities around the country.

If Democrats analyze the votes cast on election day, they may learn that Hispanics went to the polls with other issues on their minds (e.g., Iraq, the economy, corruption) but became more interested in voting in November 2006 because of the immigration debate. They may learn that
Latinos were just as concerned about illegal immigration as other Americans but were (and continue to be) quick to notice when legitimate concerns over a broken immigration system become the basis for attacking all Hispanics, regardless of legal status. Lastly, they may also learn that, like other Americans, Latinos expect Congress to tackle and solve the nation’s problems. If Democrats now in control of Congress come home in 2008 asking voters to keep them in power without having addressed some of the toughest problems facing our nation, including our broken immigration system, Latinos, like other Americans, may decide to give control to someone else.

Amidst the general glee in Democratic campaign headquarters across the country as the November 2006 results came in, there was an additional reason to crow — initial post-election analysis indicated that Hispanics had returned to the Democratic column. In 2004, the Republicans had touted their inroads into the Hispanic community. That year, President Bush received about 40 percent of the Latino vote, an increase of about 10 percentage points from the 2000 election. Yet in 2006, Latinos preferred Democratic candidates at rates ranging from 67 percent (reelecting Governor Napolitano of Arizona) to 73 percent (electing Robert Menendez of New Jersey to the Senate).

Broadly speaking, Latinos increased their support for Democratic candidates nationally to 69 percent as compared to 58 percent in 2004, based on exit polls. When compared to the 2002 midterm election, there is no question that Democrats improved their support among Latino voters — then the spread was 61 percent Democratic to 37 percent Republican. Whether the change was plus 11 points as compared to 2004, or plus 8 points when compared to 2002, given the closeness of many elections in 2006, this shift is not insubstantial. Many are quick to point to the Republicans’ strident and hostile tone toward immigrants as giving the Latino edge to Democrats. But before Democrats start to count on the Hispanic vote as a solid blue block, they should ask: “Who are these Hispanic voters?”

First, for several election cycles there has been a lot of hype about the potential increase in Latino voters. Part of the interest in this electorate is due simply to basic math. The Hispanic share of the U.S. electorate is growing — directly correlated to the growth in the Hispanic population as a whole (now almost 44 million people). Yet even though Latinos constitute about 14.6 percent of the total U.S. population (as compared to 65 percent white, 12.3 percent black), the percentages of both eligible voters (39 percent as compared to 77 percent white and 65 percent black) and registered voters (51 percent of eligible voters as compared to 69 percent white and 63 percent black), are significantly

![Graph: Eligible and Registered Voters, 2006](source: Pew Hispanic Center, "Hispanics and the 2006 Election," October 17, 2006.)
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less than other groups. This can be explained in part by the large percentage of Latinos who are not citizens and the greater percentage of the Hispanic population (as compared to the broader public) that is under 18.

Even so, the gap between registered voters (about 8.6 million) and eligible voters (17 million), make community activists, Hispanic political leaders, political operatives and political parties keenly interested in this electorate. Additionally, as Latinos have settled in the South and Midwest — beyond the traditional receiving states of New York, California, Texas and Florida — the potential impact of even a small increase in voting participation by this population generates nervous attention from politicians at all levels of government. Whoever can design and implement a program that significantly reduces the gap between registered and eligible voters and increases the voter participation rate of this electorate will be in a position of significant political and policy influence. (Alas, that’s a story for another day.)

Analysts of Latino voting behavior routinely describe the Hispanic population as diverse, coming from different countries and including both the native-born and recent immigrants. But that does not even begin to describe the diversity. One fact that is not clearly understood but bears underscoring is that the vast majority (75 percent) of Hispanic eligible voters are native-born and of that number almost half (48 percent) are third generation or more (U.S.-born of U.S.-born parents). This means that an issue like immigration may not resonate equally across the Latino community or have the emotional salience many would expect.

When almost 50 percent of the Latino electorate is third generation or more, trying to stroke the immigrant heart strings may be a little harder. In that sense, Hispanics may be echoing the pattern of previous immigrant waves as they assimilate and acculturate. This is certainly true when it comes to language — by the third generation, less than 5 percent of Americans of Hispanic descent speak Spanish. Certainly, the further removed from the immigrant generation, the less in common Hispanic-Americans may have with recent arrivals, including being able to communicate in Spanish.

These facts may help explain why Senator Kyl, an Arizona Republican, received 41 percent of the Hispanic vote in spite of his strong anti-immigrant positions. As ground zero for the immigration debate and home of the Minutemen, one would have assumed that in Arizona the Hispanic electorate would decisively reject a politician with extreme views like Senator Kyl. Yet they did not. Hispanics also voted 48 percent in favor of a statewide initiative making English the official language. While technically unrelated to immigration enforcement, English-only initiatives are often proxies for concerns that immigration — illegal and legal — is out of control.

Yet restrictionists cannot claim a complete victory. In this very same border state a founder of the Minutemen who ran primarily on an anti-immigrant platform, Republican Randy Graf, lost decisively to Democrat Gabrielle Giffords in the race for an open House seat. Giffords is an advocate for comprehensive immigration reform, including the legalization of millions of undocumented residents. Her nuanced approach was likely appreciated by voters, especially Hispanics who comprise 18 percent of this district.

Equally important, in a stunning upset Republican incumbent J.D. Hayworth, also campaigning hard against illegal immigration, lost to comprehensive immigration reform advocate and Democrat, Harry Mitchell. What exit polls revealed about these two races, and other races across the country, was that voters did not accept the immigration debate as the latest version of the “national security and terrorism” message. American voters seemed to understand that immigration reform is a highly complex issue and, moreover, it was not uppermost on voters’ minds. The silver bullet hoped for by the Republican House leadership turned out to be made of lead.

Another conclusion that can be drawn from this data is that a balanced approach to immigration reform, including the legalization of millions, is not the Achilles heel that some Democrats had feared. Before Republicans and even conservative and Blue Dog Democrats conclude that they can safely take a tough, anti-immigrant stance without being harmed at the ballot box, they should remember that 50 percent of the Hispanic electorate is either foreign born or has at least one foreign-born parent. For that part of the electorate, the harsh immigration views held by some politicians may be a negative or even a motivator to participate in elections.

In a national poll conducted just before the 2006 election by the National Council of La Raza and the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials, 50 percent of Hispanic registered and likely voters indicated that they were “more enthusiastic” about voting this year than in previous elections. Seventy-five percent of respondents rated their interest in the election between eight and ten on a scale of one to ten as compared to 6 percent when polled in late September 2006. Also, though only 9 percent of those polled listed immigration as their most important issue — ranking education, the war in Iraq and the economy and jobs as more important — more than half of those responding said that immigration was one of the most important issues deciding their vote.

These nuances are evident in the results of two Colorado races. In the 7th Congressional District, Democrat Ed
Perlmutter was routinely attacked for being soft on illegal immigration. In a district where the previous congressman, Republican Bob Beauprez, had won by 55 percent; where registered Republicans outnumbered registered Democrats by 36 to 30 percent; and where 16 percent of the electorate is Hispanic, Perlmutter won hands down. Voters deemed Perlmutter’s support for comprehensive immigration reform, stronger employer enforcement and a path to legalization for the undocumented a more realistic solution to the problem than the proposals of his opponent, the Republican Rick O’Donnell, who advocated sending high school boys to patrol the border to help build their character by combating illegal immigration.

In Colorado’s 4th District, Republican incumbent Marilyn Musgrave squeaked by Democratic challenger Angie Paccione, 46 percent to 43 percent (104,876 to 97,670). This district also has a sizeable Latino population at 17 percent. The real story was that the third party candidate Eric Eidsness walked away with 25,880 votes or 11 percent, half of which could have given the Democrat the victory. Paccione had run a tough anti-illegal immigrant ad, stressing enforcement. Initial analysis indicates that about 14 percent of the Hispanic vote went to Eidsness. While the ultimate result in this race cannot be completely attributed to Paccione’s tough anti-immigrant stance, it certainly seemed to have been in the mix.

Finally, in the hotly contested and closely-watched 11th District of California, incumbent Richard Pombo lost to Democrat Jay McNerny (53 percent to 47 percent, by 10,500 votes). While most of the attention on this race was focused on Pombo’s terrible environmental record and his connections to disgraced lobbyist Jack Abramoff, one shouldn’t ignore the fact that the district is 19.7 percent Hispanic. Notwithstanding that agriculture — a sector heavily dependent on undocumented Hispanic farmworkers — is one of his district’s top industries, Pombo refused to endorse proposals that would have legalized that workforce. There were several voter registration and mobilization efforts targeted to Latino voters and preliminary results seem to show that Hispanics overwhelmingly supported the Democratic candidate.

The only way to reconcile these various results in Arizona, Colorado, California and across the country is to go back to the basics. Hispanics are diverse; they differ linguistically and ethnically as well as by country of origin and time in the U.S. And that diversity must be minutely
examined, analyzed and absorbed if political parties, particularly Democrats, ever hope to really make the Hispanic electorate a reliable part of the base.

Thus, the support for English-only policies among Hispanics in Arizona can be understood if one realizes that a significant part of Arizona’s Hispanic electorate has been in the country for more than three generations. But those same Hispanics rejected the anti-immigrant platforms put forth by Republicans Graf and Hayworth, preferring Democratic candidates who offered more balanced and nuanced approaches. And while Hispanics in Colorado’s 4th district share some characteristics with Arizona Hispanics, they seem to have been turned off by Paccione’s anti-immigrant rhetoric and some of them may have decided to support the third party candidate rather than the Democrat.

As the 2008 election campaign starts heating up and candidates begin making plans to court Hispanic voters, they also ought to try to understand the impact of the immigration debate on the 18–24 cohort of the Hispanic population. Anecdotal stories are circulating around the country regarding the politicization of the young — high school and college students — who participated in the spring 2006 immigrant mobilizations. For many, this was their first foray into civic engagement. Many young people demonstrated on behalf of their parents and thus became highly sensitized to this polarizing issue. Many are likely to continue to feel the responsibility to register to vote on behalf of noncitizen parents and relatives. Their thus far untapped energy and motivation should not be lost on political organizers. These young people may be particularly sensitive to harsh rhetoric from either party.

The reality is that the immigration issue is not the key to lock in the Latino vote. However, candidates who take aggressive anti-immigrant positions run the risk of alienating at least some part of the Hispanic electorate. They may also unwittingly motivate previously uninvolved Hispanic citizens to register and vote. In the polarized and closely-divided country that we live in, where elections are increasingly decided by minute percentages, increased participation by any segment of the population becomes important. And given the demographic trends, the participation rate of this population should be of great interest to political observers of all stripes, Republican and Democrat alike.

Maria Echaveste is Lecturer in Residence at Berkeley’s Boalt Hall School of Law, Senior Scholar at CLAS and the cofounder of the Nueva Vista Group, a consulting firm. She served as Deputy Chief of Staff in the Clinton White House from 1998–2001.

Who Is the Latino Voter?

A 2006 Latino voter registration drive in Los Angeles.
E

vision a Bohr model of an atom, but replace the little electrons zipping around the nucleus with ideas buzzing around the head of a single person. Seemingly disconnected words and ideas fly around, constantly jumping energy levels, yet maintaining a constant orbit — DNA, social movements, capacity-building, polymerase chain reaction, south-south partnerships, dengue hemorrhagic fever, plasma leakage, palm pilots, abuelitas, electrophoresis, reggaeton. Somehow Dr. Eva Harris provides the central atomic core tying all these ideas together, making their connections seem so obvious that you wonder why others don’t link them as she does.

And yet few could match the atomic energy levels that she brings to her work. Dr. Harris, virologist at the UC Berkeley School of Public Health, appears to have boundless energy for practicing science within its social milieu. She blends an enthusiasm for high caliber scientific research with a passion for the people that her science serves. Her work shows that the way one approaches academic questions can in fact transcend the details of the questions themselves.

At CLAS, Harris squeezed three lectures into one by speaking at three times the speed of most professors. “I probably should’ve chosen one, but I couldn’t help myself,” she said. Her talk focused on the programs she has created over the past 20 years to tackle dengue fever — a mosquito-borne illness which has reached epidemic proportions in Latin America since the mid-1990s — using biomedical research, information technology and community participation.

Harris knows how to talk to a diverse audience. “Don’t get scared, it’s DNA, but it’s okay,” she said as she quickly explained the fundamentals of molecular biology. She

PUBLIC HEALTH

Science, Sustainability and the South

By Karen Levy
then went on to discuss examples of the ways in which her science has informed public health problems in Nicaragua and in other countries in Latin America in real-time.

In 2000, she helped diagnose an outbreak of dengue fever in Paraguay using the tools of molecular biology and working with the Ministry of Health. “In Paraguay they were like, ‘help!’” she recounted. “The CDC was busy, Brazil was busy, so they said, ‘Eva, can you come help us?’” Using molecular diagnostics, she and the Paraguayan team were able to determine that the dengue strains were coming in from Brazil via the border bus stations. The Ministry of Health was then able to target interventions to the specific locales where the epidemic was entering the country and, by acting quickly, was able to keep it from spreading.

Discussing her work in Bolivia, she described the laboratory equipment improvised by her colleagues there. In order to make a centrifuge, they fused faucet widgets with a blender to create the “Blenderfuge.” They also took an old record player and transferred the circular motion to horizontal motion in order to make a lab shaker. These researchers were inspired by a concept that she used at the onset of her career. She wrote a manual about how to carry out polymerase chain reactions — the fundamental tool of molecular biology — in something akin to coffee cans.

“What you do in this country is buy a $10,000 machine. If you just know you need to buy a machine, you’re stuck. But if you understand the biophysical properties of DNA hybridization and annealing… you can do what the machine does yourself.”

Ironically, her colleagues in Nicaragua have now convinced her to also do the reverse: to use high tech equipment in her community work. They have piloted the use of geographic information systems, palm pilots and fingerprint scanning technology to systematize a large study of dengue virus in children. “I don’t know how many of you have ever been to Managua, but there are no addresses,” she said. “People say ‘go to where the Pepsi sign was before the earthquake,’ which was in 1972. And then you get there, and it looks different because it rained the night before.” Technology has helped the researchers find and then relocate the 4,000 children enrolled in the study and keep track of their records.

Of equal importance, using this equipment has enhanced the computer literacy and confidence of the health workers who have been trained to use it. “They learned to use PDAs, and now they’re emailing; they’re doing research on the Web.” But it doesn’t stop there. “The Nicaraguan government has asked us to help computerize entries of newborns to help with their national vaccination schedules. And Gates wants the Nicaraguans to train the Africans.”

These cascade effects of scientific capacity building are what feed Harris’ passion. Instead of relying on traditional approaches to combating dengue fever such as hanging posters in health centers and deploying outsiders to spray people’s homes, her group is engaging volunteer Barrio Brigades to educate the community about the disease and how to control it.

This work has rallied the community beyond her expectations. “Dengue is the banner, but in fact social mobilizing has been the result,” she explained. “Gang members have now become brigadistas, and the project is solving delinquency problems, which in fact are bigger in this area than the dengue problem. They are writing dengue reggaeton songs about the larvas and the pupas. It’s truly amazing to see what happens when you give them the information and let them run with it.”

“What I’ve tried to do in my life and in my work has been to take scientific capacities, knowledge and tools, and bring them to the hands of people in Latin America to use as they see fit,” she said.

Just as the electrons surrounding the Bohr atom emit energy by shifting from one orbital to another, Harris sustains her energy level by switching back and forth between the excitement of the molecular virology laboratory she runs in Berkeley and her community development work. When asked about how she manages to engage in this work,
given the intense pressures of academia, she laughed. “This is my fun stuff. I also have my virology laboratory and all of my other work that I do here as a real professor.” Yet her scientific work is far from mundane. She is one of the world’s foremost experts on dengue fever and publishes in leading scientific journals.

“You have to be able to defend your existence in academe,” she explained, “but I think it’s really important to bring something out of that science that actually benefits people, and to do that vocally and make it explicit, instead of just making sure that your grant is renewed.”

“In the end, it’s important not just to publish a paper but to put it into public health practice,” she explained. “You actually do something beyond a research project, which is really our theme.”

Eva Harris is Associate Professor of Public Health at UC Berkeley and the founder and president of the Sustainable Sciences Institute (SSI). Professor Harris was awarded the MacArthur “Genius” Fellowship in 1997. She gave a talk entitled “Infectious Disease Research in Latin America: A Platform for Scientific Capacity Building and Social Mobilization” at CLAS on October 30.

Karen Levy is a doctoral student in Environmental Science, Policy and Management.
El Comandante Returns

By Francisca Ortega

For his presidential campaign erstwhile revolutionary Daniel Ortega chose a former Contra as his running mate, changed his party’s color from red to a diluted pink and watered-down his fiery Leninist rhetoric to “peace, love and reconciliation” with a John Lennon soundtrack.

And won. After 16 years in the opposition and three failed presidential runs, Ortega and his party, the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN), have retaken the reins in Nicaragua.

“Number one you have to recognize [Ortega’s] a very persistent man. He doesn’t give up,” Nicaraguan journalist and former Sandinista Carlos Chamorro told a UC Berkeley audience.

Nicaragua is the largest country in Central America but also the poorest. More than 30 percent of the population over age 15 can’t read, half live below poverty level and nearly 45 percent are underemployed.

What will Ortega’s reelection mean for the country, and what can be expected from his presidency? Chamorro’s answer was that it is too soon to tell. As a candidate, Ortega did not lay out a clear plan for his presidency and avoided all debate and media interviews during the campaign.

While expressing optimism that Ortega will govern well, Chamorro added, “My biggest fear is that he won’t be able to enact the social reforms that the country needs.”

Caught between voter expectations and a shortfall of cash, Ortega will have to tread carefully to pass reform legislation. Nicaragua’s economy is reliant on loans and foreign donations. To keep that money flowing, the president will have to continue working with the International Monetary Fund, which in turn will limit how much he can spend on social programs.

For Chamorro, the solution to this problem lies in tax reform. In a country of over 5 million people, only about 100,000 pay taxes, he said. But members of the business community argue that they need the tax breaks to compensate for Nicaragua’s instability. Negotiating tax reform will not be easy. Since the elections, Ortega has sought to calm the business sector through a series of promises that mark a nearly complete about-face from his anti-imperialist stance of the 1980s; he has vowed to respect private property, encourage small-businesses and continue a diplomatic relationship with the United States.

“[Ortega’s] not proposing a socialist economy. He’s basically saying, ‘I want to guarantee investment, but I have my own priorities. And my priority is to help the poor. My priority is social problems,’” Chamorro said.

At the same time Ortega is strengthening his friendship with Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez, a fact that has some in the United States worried. Before the elections Oliver North and Paul Trivelli, the U.S. Ambassador to Nicaragua, warned voters against supporting Ortega. In the months since the election, however, the U.S. and Nicaragua have agreed to work with each other.

“He’s not promoting revolution. He’s promoting reform, but he will always have a tendency not to accept that that’s he’s doing because Ortega sees himself as a revolutionary leader not as a normal president. He’s el comandante,” Chamorro said in an interview after his speech.

“He’s always playing with the revolutionary rhetoric.”

Ortega was reelected in large part due to an agreement he made with his formal rival, ex-president Arnoldo Alemán, in 2000. Known as “el pacto,” this agreement changed election requirements in Ortega’s favor. Under the new rules, instead
of a 45 percent majority, Ortega needed either 40 percent of the vote or at least 35 percent and a 5 percent lead over the second place candidate to avoid a run-off.

These rules are “like a tailored suit for Daniel Ortega, who has always had about 35 to 40 percent of the vote,” said Chamorro.

Negotiated at a time when Ortega was facing political fallout from charges that he molested his stepdaughter, el pacto also gave Ortega more control of the judicial system and the National Assembly. In return Alemán received only house arrest after being convicted of money laundering, embezzlement and corruption.

Alemán’s Constitutional Liberal Party (PLC) fractured over el pacto and the corruption charges. Eduardo Montealegre ran for president as head of the conservative, pro-American Nicaraguan Liberal Alliance (ALN) created by disaffected former PLC members. Ortega’s FSLN coalition also unraveled in 2006, and the Sandinista offshoot party, the Sandinista Renovation Movement (MRS), fielded Edmundo Jarquin in the presidential race. Eden Pastora, the famous Sandinista turned Contra, also ran in the election.

This splintered opposition allowed Ortega to win the election with just 38 percent of the vote, a smaller percentage than he received in the previous elections which he ultimately lost.

Ortega also gained votes by reaching out to the Catholic Church and ex-rival Cardinal Miguel Obando Bravo. The Cardinal officiated at Ortega’s marriage to his longterm girlfriend, Rosario Murillo. Ortega then passed a ban on abortion 10 days before the election.

“(Ortega says) we’re starting a revolution, but it’s a spiritual revolution, and what does that mean? Nobody knows,” said Chamorro.

People in the country are anxious, but hopeful, Chamorro said. They are willing to give Ortega the benefit of the doubt.

Renowned journalist Carlos F. Chamorro was formerly the editor of the Sandinista newspaper La Barricada and currently serves as director of the television program Esta Semana y Esta Noche and as editor of the weekly paper Confidencial. He spoke at CLAS on November 30.

Francisca Ortega is a dual-master’s graduate student in UC Berkeley’s Graduate School of Journalism and the Latin American Studies program. She is not related to Daniel Ortega.
RH: The fact that for the most part you leave out the torturers — we see the hands and we see the boots — leaves the dogs do the symbolic work, I thought.

FB: This is very important. They actually attack the prisoner; they are not just threatening him because in the photos you clearly see blood on the prisoner’s legs.

But back to what you were saying: These were young people. There wasn’t a clear definition of what was allowed and, in a very ignorant and inhuman way, they did things that had no explanation.

RH: I was looking at one small painting — a profile of ferocious dog. The dog’s skin is almost green, and the mouth is red, very terrifying. I found myself thinking about German expressionism, George Grosz, your paintings of the dictators in the 1960s, how they seem connected, how art critics have connected your work of that period to German paintings of the 1920s. I was running this number in my head and turned to the woman standing next to me to say all this stuff and saw a tear going down her cheek. I realized that I’d been defending myself against seeing what was actually there by running all this intellectual art history through my head. Were you able to keep a distance while you were painting?

FB: Well, as I said there is this spark, there is a spark of anger that creates the sketch. It is something that takes seconds, usually less than half a minute, and it is there.

Then the act of painting, even if it’s a dramatic subject, the act is sensual; it’s something that you do with love. Of course, as I said before, it’s not the same as painting a beautiful landscape or a still life of beautiful fruit. To paint human suffering is different; the experience is different.

The act of painting is a wonderful thing because it is like an ecstasy. I always tell people that painting is like going to the movies. You don’t exist; it’s the movie that exists, you are there. One thing that is also interesting is that I can stand for seven or eight hours a day painting and I don’t feel tired. If I go to a cocktail party, after half an hour I’m dead. It is very strange. I don’t know why.

Picasso said when you paint you don’t get tired because you leave your body outside. It is like a little ecstasy. You don’t exist. What exists is the painting. You don’t exist, you don’t suffer, you don’t get tired and you are concentrated, just like when you go to the movies but more so.

RH: That’s wonderful. Last night my wife was looking at one particular painting, and I went up to see what she was looking at. She pointed at the back of one of those small, claustrophobic canvases, at the glowing window at the end of the corridor. I realized that it was a small symbol of hope.

FB: Yes, exactly. I wanted to put in a contrast to the dark colors, dark bars and dark blood. In every painting there is a little window in white to create a contrast between the light outside the hall and the terrible, claustrophobic atmosphere inside.

RH: Kenneth Baker wrote a wonderful piece in today’s Chronicle. One of the things he said was that because this was a work of imagination and not documentary, the figures in the paintings immediately became mythic
and generalized. Rather than being these Arab kids from the streets of Baghdad, the figures felt like they belonged to a kind of Ecce Homo tradition.

And, I don’t know if this is also my looking with art history in my head to defend myself, but it also felt like these figures were almost biblical.

FB: I was very impressed by the nobility of some of the people in the photos. Many were old people with beards who looked like prophets, people who grew beards because of their religious convictions, people who had tremendous dignity. And suddenly they were in the hands of teenagers who had no knowledge of their religion, who had no respect. They called the prisoners rag heads. They had no respect for these old people. That’s why in some of the paintings I try to make them look like prophets, to show that these people in their poverty had a tremendous dignity and were treated in a terrible way by ignorants, by soldiers who had no knowledge of anything that wasn’t American. For me it was important to try to give them back their dignity.

RH: I remember reading that with your first prize money you went to Spain and set yourself up at the Prado earning money as a copyist. You must have been copying these great biblical works.

FB: I won the Colombian painting prize when I was 18. It was very important for me. My family was very poor. With the money, I went to Europe to complete my education as an artist. I knew that if I didn’t learn the techniques, I couldn’t express myself. Before you say a word you have to learn the language, and that’s what I tried to do. I went to the Prado. I was a copyist there. And fortunately people passing by bought these copies.

RH: And from Spain you went to…

FB: I went to Paris for a few months, and then I lived in Florence for two and a half years. In those days, the dream was to go to Paris and become Picasso — that’s what everybody wanted. And then one night I saw a book open in a bookstore; it was open to the reproduction of the Queen of Sheba visiting Solomon by Piero della Francesca, I saw that reproduction, and I thought it was the most beautiful thing I ever saw and that it was impossible to do something more beautiful. The next day I bought the book and realized that Florence was where I wanted to be. That’s how I changed my way of thinking: I wanted to learn about the Old Masters. And that’s why I went to Florence, and then of course I was very taken by Florentine art and…

RH: How old were you?

FB: I was 19.

RH: So you consciously went from direct to indirect painting by going from Paris…

FB: No, at that time I was doing direct painting because that’s what I did in Colombia. Of course, when I started reading about technique I realized there was another way to do it.

RH: And from Florence…

FB: From Florence I went to Colombia, and then I lived in New York for 13 years beginning in 1960. Then I moved to Paris in 1973, and I have been living there ever since.
RH: So you arrived in New York at the height of Abstract Expressionism.

FB: Exactly. It was a very difficult moment because there was a kind of dictatorship of abstract art. If you were not an Abstract Expressionist you were nothing, you were like a leper. You couldn’t get a gallery, nothing. It was very difficult to stay there.

I started becoming successful when a German museum director invited me to do an exhibition in Germany. After that, many of the world’s most important galleries, like Marlborough and Hanover Gallery in London approached me. But you know, for 10 years in New York I couldn’t get a gallery. It was very hard to sell a painting. It was a very difficult time.

RH: People date from about 1962 the emergence of your characteristic style: these large, I’ve heard critics call them volumetric, figures. No art critic says big and fat.

FB: I was very attracted to the volumetric painters of Florence because they were very sensual. I saw an exaltation of life in these paintings. Florentine artists reinvented the idea of space and volume in art. It’s something we take for granted now, but in the 13th century paintings were flat. Now we have the ability to create this illusion of space and volume. It was a tremendous discovery, made by Giotto in the 13th century.

I was very touched by the power of these paintings, the sensuality, and started to move in that direction. I was very interested in volume. But it was a few years later that I really began to develop my style. What happened was very simple. I was drawing a mandolin with a very generous outline like I learned from the Italians. Then in the moment of making the hole in the mandolin, I made it very small. Suddenly, this mandolin became huge, monumental because of the contrast between the small detail and the generous outline. I saw that something happened there. I immediately started trying to visualize other subjects. It took a long time — 10, 15 years — before I developed a more or less coherent vision of what I wanted to do, but at the beginning it was that little sketch inspired by my love of Italian art.
RH: Fascinating. When you began the Abu Ghraib paintings, did it interrupt another project? Were you working on something else that you set aside when you began this work?

FB: No, I was coming back from a trip. I got home and started the drawings immediately. I was very motivated, very motivated, because I had been reading a lot about it. I read two or three papers a day; I was very informed about what was going on.

RH: Some people have expressed surprise that you did this political…

FB: I didn't tell anyone what I was doing. I was working, working, and one day I meet a friend of mine from Colombia who has a small magazine there. He asked me what I was doing. I told him I was doing these paintings. “Why don’t you give me some photos?” he asked. “I want to publish them in the magazine.”

And so I gave him some photos. It’s amazing, you know. I gave him the photos, the magazine came out and the next day there was Associated Press, France Press, all these agencies photographing my studio and wanting to know what I was doing. It was seen all over the world.

People were so critical about Abu Ghraib that there was a desire to do something. Every time there was an opportunity to make a denunciation they immediately took the opportunity. And that’s what happened with these paintings: suddenly they were all over the place.

RH: I have that same sensation. An Egyptian writer told a journalist friend of mine that when the United States started torturing people it was as if a light had been turned off in the whole world. I thought about that last night and thought about the howl of pain and outrage in your paintings and thought that maybe they will help to turn the light back on.

A webcast of the conversation is available on our Web site at http://clas.berkeley.edu.

PATRONS WAIT OUTSIDE THE EXHIBIT ON OPENING NIGHT.
Although Fernando Botero’s “Abu Ghraib” series of paintings and drawings was shown to critical acclaim and strong public interest in museums across Europe, no U.S. museum had agreed to display the works by fall 2006. The exhibit was shown for one month at The Marlboro Gallery in New York, which often features Botero’s art, and received a glowing review in the New York Times. Harley Shaiken, Chair of the Center for Latin American Studies, saw the review and decided to issue a long-shot invitation to Mr. Botero to bring his art to the University of California, Berkeley.

On November 28, 2006, Mr. Botero responded. He said that the university would be an ideal place to display his work, and he would fly out to open the exhibit on January 26, 2007. That’s when the real work began.

While the Center for Latin American Studies exhibits art on site every semester, the staff had never attempted anything on this scale before. The first problem was to come up with an exhibition room that had 130 meters of wall space. All the usual suspects declined: the university’s museums said they were booked through 2009. One increasingly improbable site after another was discussed and dismissed. Finally, Beth Dupuis, Director of the Doe Library, agreed to explore the idea of transforming a student computer center and general library thoroughfare into an exhibition hall.

Ms. Dupuis and University Librarian Tom Leonard became strong advocates for the exhibit, lending their assistance and enthusiasm to the makeover of the space. Atthowe Fine Arts generously donated a substantial portion of the time needed to effect the transformation and deployed their considerable artistry and skill to mount the exhibit.

In the meantime, there was a whole new world to master: insuring, shipping, installing and protecting world-class art valued in the millions of dollars. Simultaneously, the Center dedicated itself to maximizing the academic impact of the exhibit by organizing the conversation with the artist and a semester-long program focusing on the issues raised by the art.

At one point during the two-month period between Mr. Botero’s first phone call and the day he stepped off the plane in Northern California, the artist noted wryly that he “wasn’t used to this level of improvisation.”

Despite the odds, the Center’s small permanent staff and an army of volunteers managed to pull together the exhibit in time for the opening.

Fifteen thousand people viewed “Abu Ghraib” during its seven week run, and the exhibit inspired articles in newspapers throughout the world, from the International Herald Tribune to Gazeta, among the most important newspapers in Poland. The San Francisco Chronicle and Sacramento Bee both ran major features as did Clarín, a key newspaper in Argentina, and La Semana, an important magazine in Colombia.

Berkeley also opened the door for other displays of these works in the United States. American University in Washington, D.C. is scheduled for a fall 2007 showing, and a number of other universities and museums are seeking time on the calendar.

All in all, not too bad as improvisations go.

Jean Spencer is Outreach and Publications Coordinator at the Center for Latin American Studies.
Fernando Botero
Abu Ghraib

(This and all following images from the “Abu Ghraib” exhibition are shown courtesy of Fernando Botero.)

"Abu Ghraib 60," 2005, oil on canvas.
“Abu Ghraib 57,” 2005, oil on canvas.
“Abu Ghraib 74,” 2005, oil on canvas.
“Abu Ghraib 52,” 2005, oil on canvas.
“Abu Ghraib 81,” 2005, pencil on paper.

“Abu Ghraib 79,” 2005, watercolor on paper.
What can a painting do that a photograph cannot? History professor Tom Laqueur opened the panel discussion “Art and Violence” with this rich question. The event brought together three professors and a large, animated audience just across the hall from the topic of the day: Fernando Botero’s “Abu Ghraib” series of paintings and drawings which is now on exhibit in UC Berkeley’s Doe Library. Though the series toured widely throughout Europe, it has appeared only once in the United States. The Berkeley exhibit marks the first time it has appeared in a public institution in this country.

To answer his initial question, Laqueur explored what was missing from the exhibit. Presenting the photograph of Lynndie England holding an Iraqi prisoner on a leash — an image he considers the most emblematic of those released to the public — he wondered why was it not among the photos Botero chose to paint. Laqueur proposed that the answer has to do with gender: Botero avoided portraying England because her participation allowed Western viewers to minimize the atrocities. “If a girl committed the paradigmatic abuse at Abu Ghraib, it could not be so bad, […] because it remains difficult, given our cultural resources, to imagine women as violent. […] Botero’s anger was directed against this sort of mitigation, this sort of ‘not-seeing.’” Laqueur suggested that the artist selected images associated with a brutal masculinity which allowed him
to bring up questions of gender reversal and highlight the sexual humiliation of the prisoners.

While the photographs of American soldiers torturing Iraqi prisoners numbed viewers, Laqueur argued, the paintings do the opposite, blocking this indifference by insisting on the suffering of the fleshy figures. The viewer’s identification with the paintings stems in part from the figures’ dignity, which Botero created through allusions to great works of Western art. Laqueur cited the painter’s deep knowledge of European art history and the “fresco-like” smooth application of paint as factors that compel the viewer to keep looking and give the figures “an almost unbearable purity.” In contrast with the photographs which, according to Laqueur, repel viewers with their gritty and unapologetic realism, the violence depicted in Botero’s series is not messy. Quite the opposite: the careful composition of the paintings inspires the kind of “slow seeing” that can lead to a viewer’s ethical engagement with a work of art.

T.J. Clark, a professor of Art History, agreed that Botero is strongly influenced by the Quattrocento and other moments of the Western art tradition, but he disagreed with Laqueur’s interpretation of those references. Clark expressed the hope that art in its current, “hypermodern” crisis would “stay true to the sordid meaninglessness of the moments captured on film.” To do this, he said, an artist would have to explore Abu Ghraib’s fundamental distance from the narratives that have defined Western artistic culture, such as the association of physical suffering with redemption and the sacred. For Clark, the secularism and banality of the U.S. soldiers in the Abu Ghraib photographs is precisely what makes them so appalling. The paintings, on the other hand, avoid particularizing the subjects and instead attempt to monumentalize and universalize them, morphing them into ciphers in an ill-fitting Christian narrative.

Clark argued that by not depicting the vacancy and senselessness so apparent in the photographs, Botero failed to engage with the fundamental problem they posed. “I’m interested in the torturer with the Toshiba, not the fantasy degenerate doing his dreadful work again, with ropes and thorns and fountains of urine, to the Sunni man of sorrows.” The problem with this series, Clark maintained, is that it tries to make Abu Ghraib part of a familiar narrative. “The photographs blocked a universalizing response, and a painting based on the photographs should try to do the same thing.” Laqueur and Clark thus seemed to be in agreement on the universalizing effect of the paintings, but they differed sharply on the value of this gesture.

Professor Francine Masiello, of the Spanish and Comparative Literature departments, continued Laqueur’s contextualizing work with a new angle, turning not to the great names of the Italian Renaissance but rather to the Latin American tradition. From the pre-Columbian statues of the Olmecs which she posited as a formal precursor to Botero’s massive figures, to the work on the theme of violence by fellow Colombian artists Alejandro Obregón and Doris Salcedo, Masiello referenced Latin American art as a manifest influence on this series. Viewers familiar with the calm and joyful scenes typical of much of Botero’s

“Guernica” by Pablo Picasso, 1937.
© 2007 Estate of Pablo Picasso / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

Picasso’s “Guernica” could only be displayed online for a limited amount of time.
work may be surprised by the “Abu Ghraib” series, but the violence it portrays is part of a long tradition in which art speaks for those who have been silenced. Botero’s close connection with that Latin American legacy is especially clear in his works from the 1960s and the late 1990s which focused on violence in Colombia and provide an important point of reference for understanding his “Abu Ghraib.”

In Latin American art, representations of suffering revolve around a fundamental question: How does one account for what the official history doesn’t record? For Masiello, the symbolism of the blindfold is Botero’s answer to this question. By almost obsessively portraying blindfolds, he forces the viewer to see and acknowledge the senseless suffering that occurred at Abu Ghraib. By depicting the brutal, physical pain of his subjects, Botero enters into the tradition of art as a testimony to outrage, in which the oblivion and silence imposed by the torturers is made impossible.

Masiello also noted that space began to figure significantly in Botero’s canvases when he turned to violence as his subject matter. He began to paint enclosures that “lock human subjects within limited possibilities of movement.” By noting that pain is grounded in a space, Masiello joined Clark in suggesting that violence is always particular and specific. She pressed the point further, proposing that the body is a necessary starting point for interpretation and the senses are a way to political awakening.

The animated question-and-answer session that followed these papers opened up the discussion to varied topics, such as the faculty’s relationship to state policies endorsing torture, the work of U.S. artists who take up similar themes and the difficulty artists have historically had in responding to quickly-changing political situations. Two audience members questioned the appropriateness of depicting the suffering of non-Western subjects in an aesthetic so steeped in the traditions of the Christian West. The panelists, however, all resisted the idea that a work of art should reproduce the conditions that inspired the artist. They disagreed instead on the degree to which Botero was successful in artistically reworking the torture photographs of Abu Ghraib.

T.J. Clark is Professor of Art History, Francine Masiello is Professor of Spanish and of Comparative Literature and Tom Laqueur is Professor of History, all at the University of California at Berkeley. On January 31, 2007, they spoke on a panel titled “Art and Violence,” in the Morrison Room of Doe Library.

Sarah Moody is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese.
American human rights abuses committed post-9/11 have sparked a contentious debate about the use of torture in the fight against terrorism. While torture has historically been illegal in the United States, the threat of terrorism coupled with the escalation of violence in Iraq has led to executive and judicial justification for the use of cruel and inhumane treatment. Exposés about the handling of prisoners at Guantánamo and Abu Ghraib have caused both Americans and observers overseas to ask how a country that once promoted human rights could have allowed such abuses to occur and, having done so, whether the U.S. retains any moral authority in the international community.

Why does torture happen, and why do we condone it? In examining the effects of torture, what role does art have in upholding the value of human rights? In “Torture, Human Rights and Terrorism,” a panel inspired by Fernando Botero’s paintings of Abu Ghraib, Aryeh Neier, José Zalaquett, Jenny Martinez and Philip Zimbardo addressed these questions, examining the history and determinants of torture through the fields of human rights, psychology, jurisprudence and art.

As the former executive director of both Human Rights Watch and the American Civil Liberties Union and the current president of the Open Society Institute, Aryeh Neier draws on a vast amount of experience in the field of human rights. Neier began the discussion with an idea borrowed from Elaine Scarry’s *The Body in Pain*, noting that, “the ability to inflict torture is the ability to exercise absolute authority over others.” In other words, the torturer is determined not only to elicit information but to force the victim into complete and total submission.

The link between the events at Abu Ghraib and what has taken place more generally since 9/11 is the need to exercise power, Neier argued. “Sept. 11 was an extraordinary demonstration of American vulnerability. Here were these enormous buildings that were destroyed by 19 people armed with box cutters… It seems to me that the need to engage in a demonstration of American power was the most significant reaction that took place to Sept. 11.”

For Neier, attempts to wield absolute power start at the top and trickle down. At the top, the Bush administration pushed hard to expand executive power and give the president the ability to override both Congress and international commitments like the Geneva Conventions. This loosening of established norms set the stage for the abuse of power at lower levels as was made painfully clear in the dozens of photographs taken by foot soldiers at Abu Ghraib featuring prisoners dragged around by dog collars and soldiers smiling next to pyramids of naked men.

“If we are to deal with the torture and many of the other things that have taken place since 9/11, we have to above all question this idea, reject this idea, of absolute power,” Neier maintained. The goal of torture is “to secure absolute submission,” he added. “We have tried to secure that kind of submission in Iraq. It has not worked.”

Later in the panel, renowned psychologist Philip Zimbardo returned to the question of why the attempt to make others submit leads to acts of torture. The author of *The Lucifer Effect: Why Good People Turn Evil* and the principal architect of the famous 1971 Stanford Prison Experiment, Zimbardo described how certain environments can turn rational, law abiding citizens into dangerous aggressors. “Situations corrupt people,” he asserted. “Good people can be led to do evil things… in a very short time, I could make most of you do things that you would now say were unimaginable.”

In Zimbardo’s groundbreaking Stanford study, a group of college students who had been specifically chosen for their emotional stability after undergoing a barrage of personality tests were randomly divided into two groups: guards and prisoners. The guards were given uniforms and sunglasses to hide their eyes, and the prisoners were subjected to a process of “deindividuation”: they exchanged their names for numbers and were forced to wear women’s smocks and nylon stocking caps over their hair. On day one, nothing much happened; both guards and prisoners were awkward and self-conscious in their roles. The second day, the prisoners rebelled, and the guards began to see them as dangerous. Gradually, attempts by the guards to control the prisoners escalated into full-scale abuse, and the prisoners started to break down under extreme stress. The experiment, intended to last for two weeks, had to be stopped after six days.

“Why was I not surprised by photos of Abu Ghraib?” Zimbardo asked. Startlingly, the participants in his study...
had employed near identical methods of humiliation, including the use of nudity and sexual degradation and the placement of bags over prisoners’ heads. Zimbardo described Abu Ghraib guard Sergeant Ivan “Chip” Frederick — for whom he served as an expert witness for the defense — as exactly like the “good” guards in the Stanford study on day one. Over a three-month period working 12 hour shifts seven days a week in the grim prison where inmate riots and enemy bombardment were a constant threat and military interrogators pressured guards to “soften up” the prisoners, Frederick became the monster in the photographs. He devised many of the more ingenious methods of torture including the one made famous in the photo of a hooded detainee standing on a cardboard box with fake electrodes attached to his hands.

The lesson, Zimbardo argued, is that the prison guards in Abu Ghraib weren’t simply “bad apples.” Instead, they were normal people placed in an environment that encouraged the abuse of those under their control. He called this environment a “bad barrel” and suggested that the designers and builders of that barrel should be held accountable. For Zimbardo, the tragedy of Abu Ghraib was not simply that inmates there were tortured but that the architects of the war created inhumane conditions for both its military personnel and their Iraqi prisoners.

Stanford law professor Jenny Martinez similarly emphasized that torture degrades the society that adopts it. An experienced litigator, Martinez famously argued the 2004 Rumsfeld v. Padilla case before the U.S. Supreme
Court, defending constitutional protections for U.S. citizens deemed “enemy combatants.” Central to her argument was the idea that it “is more dangerous and degrading to a country and a legal system to attempt to justify in the law the practice of torture than for the unfortunate thing to simply happen.”

Martinez began by analyzing the legal precedents concerning torture. The limitation on the exercise of torture dates back to 15th century England where it was prohibited because, in contrast to the Continental system, the jury system did not require a confession. However, until the 17th century, the king was able to override common law and order a person to be tortured. This loophole was closed in 1640 when a blanket ban on torture was enacted. The United States inherited the English system of common law and thus, coerced testimony has been inadmissible in court since the country’s founding. Over time, international law also moved to limit the use of torture. Today, the ban on torture is one of the strongest norms in international law; no emergency or state of warfare can legally justify its use.

However, since Sept. 11, the Bush administration has attempted to define torture so narrowly that almost any treatment is legitimate. Martinez argued that American sanctioning of torture in documents such as the 2002 Bybee Torture Memo, principally written by Boalt Law Professor John Yoo, sets a dangerous legal precedent. The memo not only justified the president’s unfettered authority to wage war but also advanced an extremely narrow definition of torture whereby physical pain inflicted must be “equivalent in intensity to the pain accompanying serious physical injury, such as organ failure, impairment of bodily function, or even death.” The memo summarized the Bush Administration’s war strategy, a strategy that gave rise to the humiliations of Abu Ghraib precisely because they were not deemed to rise to the level of “torture.”

Martinez cited Justice Jackson’s famous dissent in Korematsu v. United States that upheld the decision to intern Japanese Americans during World War II. Jackson argued that the case set a dangerous precedent that would act as a “loaded gun” there for governments to use in the future. In the same way, the post-9/11 legal justifications for torture may be used to condone future abuses by the U.S. government as well as by other governments who may use the American example to justify their own abuses.

Has the erosion of Constitutional protections and the Geneva Conventions made a silent civil society little better than a guilty accomplice? The panelists each suggested that there is a danger in remaining passive. Prof. José Zalaquett,
former president of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, presented art as one way to take a stand against the abuse of power.

Zalaquett began with the assumption that art both echoes and shapes the spirit of its time. He reflected on historical depictions of violence and war in Western art, focusing on three major periods: the Renaissance to the end of the 18th century; the 19th century through World War II; and post-WWII to the present.

During the first period, artists didn’t take a moral stance on war and torture. Suffering, both that of Christ and of the damned, were central to the era’s understanding of Christianity. While the suffering of Christ was often so sublimated in art that He looked almost comfortable on the cross, artists “went to great lengths to awe and frighten the faithful with depictions of hell.” Alternately, the violence of slavery, conquest and the Inquisition was portrayed very matter-of-factly, more a “documentation than a commentary or moral outcry.”

The second period emerges from the American and French Revolutions and begins with Goya and his “Disasters of War.” The idea that people were, or should be, equal before the law regardless of class or caste led to an increased awareness of injustice. Artists frequently depicted the violence of anonymous, machine-like soldiers, as in Goya’s “Third of May” or Manet’s “Execution of Emperor Maximillian.” For Zalaquett, this was, “a period where art bears witness, denounces atrocities and vindicates victims.”

In the third, post-WWII phase, artists tried to come to grips with the ruins of the past. They chose abstraction as their medium because, “depicting the holocaust realistically doesn’t capture the enormity of the crimes.” Abstract monuments such as the Berlin Holocaust Memorial, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and Chile’s Peace Park were erected in this period and abstract works such as Alfredo Jaar’s “The Eyes of Guete Emerita” attempted convey the extent of the suffering in places like Rwanda. Botero’s “Abu Ghrabi” series almost seems an anomaly for this era. In it, the artist rejects the use of abstraction and returns to the figurative depiction of violence more common in the second period. However, this shift can be explained by the unfortunate fact that once again artists must confront contemporary human rights abuses rather than attempt to remember past crimes and their victims.

In many ways, Zalaquett’s survey of Western art echoed Martinez’ history of the legal precedent regarding torture: both capture a societal transformation from a compliant and detached acceptance of torture to a moral condemnation of it.

Human societies may never eradicate the use of torture, but we are armed with valuable weapons with which to abate its occurrence. The history of Western art reflects humanity’s infinite capacity to engender torture; a history of jurisprudence reminds us why the modern democratic state created proscriptions against it. With these tools, we can collectively condemn human rights abuses and pass along our moral outrage to future generations. The price of remaining silent and compliant is simply too high.

Aryeh Neier is President of the Open Society Institute; José Zalaquett is Co-director of the Human Rights Center at the University of Chile; Jenny S. Martinez is Associate Professor of Law at Stanford; and Philip Zimbardo is Professor Emeritus of Psychology at Stanford. The panel spoke at the Center for Latin American Studies’ forum on “Torture, Human Rights, and Terrorism,” held at UC Berkeley on March 7, 2007.

Veronica Herrera is a doctoral student in the Department of Political Science.
The news was wonderful for both Fernando Botero and the Center for Latin American Studies. For the artist because for the first time a U.S. public institution was exhibiting his series on torture at Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq, and for the Center because the exhibition was the best possible occasion to invite reflection on human rights and the war in Iraq.

Fernando Botero, the Colombian painter and sculptor, is the most famous living Latin American artist in the world. His masterpieces, full of stout characters interpreting the world’s powerful leaders with colorful irony, have been exhibited at New York’s Museum of Modern Art, the Grand Palais in Paris, and the Hermitage Museum in Saint Petersburg, to mention just a few. His monumental sculptures have been exhibited on the Champs-Elysées in Paris, Park Avenue in New York, Grand Canal in Venice, Paseo de los Recoletos in Madrid and in many other cities.

Such an impressive background should have been recommendation enough for any museum in the world to want to exhibit his work. However, Botero’s series on the torture of Iraqi prisoners by American soldiers at Abu Ghraib prison did not receive that response in the United States.

“The truth was that in Europe, this exhibition had enormous repercussions,” recalls Fernando Botero. “It was in Rome, and it was exhibited at the National Museum of Athens. However, when the exhibition was offered through an institution in Washington called Arts Service International, I was told they had not received a positive response from museums, and therefore it could not be exhibited.”

Botero dedicated 14 months of his life to this subject,
completing the oil paintings and drawings that make up the series. Since he first read about the inhuman abuse against prisoners, he couldn’t think about anything else and only stopped painting when he believed he had said everything he wanted to say.

“It was the hypocrisy revealed by Abu Ghraib that shocked me,” the artist tells us as he walks around UC Berkeley’s Doe Library, “because a country that had presented itself before the whole world as a model of compassion and the biggest defender of human rights ended up torturing people at the same prison where Saddam Hussein tortured his opponents. The shock I felt, as a human being and as an artist, compelled me to leave a testimony against the horror.”

Nevertheless, Botero’s testimony had only reached the United States through newspaper reviews and a partial exhibition at The Marlborough Gallery in New York.

“That is why Berkeley’s invitation is so perfect. I am very proud to be here. First because this is one of the world’s greatest universities, with an enormous intellectual reputation linked to civil rights, respect for others’ opinions and freedom of speech, where this exhibition of protest fits in perfectly. And second because it is a response to the line that art has been taking, completely divorced from society’s problems. With this invitation, Berkeley is saying, ‘Art can be more than mere decoration.’”

Through his work and his statements, Botero has maintained a very critical point of view of the war in Iraq.

“It is an unjustified, unnecessary war, a blot on history. Furthermore, militarily, it is doomed to be a complete failure for the United States. The Iraqis are going to be there forever, and the United States will have to leave, if not in a year’s time, in two or in 10. All occupations have to come to an end, and this one has been very costly in terms of lives sacrificed — the lives of young people, the loss of great pieces of universal culture and, of course, also in terms of money. After the troops are withdrawn, the exacerbation of the civil and religious war between Sunnis and Shiites will remain as a sad inheritance. The country is worse off than ever while terrorism is getting stronger and stronger.”

The Colombian artist, who has also painted the violence in his country, thinks that art must have a firm commitment to humanity and its future.

“Art has, in a certain way, been indifferent to society’s
problems. Such indifference has been the rule. For example, Impressionism did not record the tragedies of the Franco-Prussian War. During the Renaissance, there was nothing. [Art was more socially engaged] during the Napoleonic era when armies took painters with them to portray the battles. But art has not been very committed to the drama and suffering of the weak. There are, of course, notable exceptions, such as the Mexican painting that was an aesthetic challenge and a recognition of social battles. The Italian, Russian and Chinese Marxist paintings are another example. Of course we also have Picasso with ‘Guernica’ and Goya with ‘Los fusilamientos’ (The Shootings), but they are really the exception to the rule.

Fernando Botero, whose work is classified by some theorists as “Figurative Expressionism,” never avoids a controversy. He has had public confrontations with representatives from other artistic trends who, as he puts it, are only painting for themselves.

“The purpose of art is to give pleasure, and it should be clear. It shouldn’t be necessary to have a professor by your side to explain why the painting is important. If one looks at the work of Velázquez, Rubens, Piero della Francesca — it is an extraordinary exaltation of man. It does not put him down but rather exalts him. Today, however, art is made to humiliate man because it is saying, ‘You don’t understand; you are an ignorant fool. Here is something I am trying to say and you don’t understand it.’ The truth is that there is nothing to understand. I believe that it was by pretending the opposite that this divorce between man and art began.”

It also isn’t easy to understand that art, as Botero puts it, should “give pleasure” while at the same time recording human miseries. In other words, how can an artistic series like Botero’s “Abu Ghraib” give pleasure?

“The thing is that art has an aesthetic component that gives pleasure. Like at the theater, at the theater for example you have drama and dramatic music that also gives pleasure. Likewise, there are painters throughout the history of art who did exclusively dramatic art. Grunewald, the great German painter, painted the crucifixions, which are perhaps the most heartrending scenes in the history of art. But there is such aesthetic beauty that you feel pleasure. Art has many elements. One of these elements is the subject. When you see a Venus by Titian, there is pleasure from the subject matter and an aesthetic pleasure. In other works the subject is dramatic but at the same time there is an aesthetic pleasure. You resist the subject, or you tolerate it, because of the aesthetic content of the painting, even if the motif is painful.”

During his four-day visit to the university, a camera crew from the BBC followed Fernando Botero everywhere. They have accompanied him across three continents and nine countries to make a documentary about his life, which had its first showing on April 19, the painter’s 75th birthday.

The producers have witnessed his work in Pietrasanta, Italy, a beautiful Tuscan town built on a marble mountain where the artist spends part of the year. They have seen him in San Pablito de la Sierra, Mexico, looking for his favorite drawing material, papel amate (fig-bark papyrus), made from fig tree bark and blackberry pulp by the last few people acquainted with ancient Mayan secrets. They accompanied him to a bullfight in Medellín, Colombia, where spectators gave Botero a long, moving ovation that the bullfighters would have liked for themselves. However, on few occasions did they see him as happy as he was during his visit to Berkeley.

“I never went to a true university. Art
schools are different: painting and painting all the time to polish your technique; looking and looking to find your style. My father died when I was a child. At the age of 17, I was expelled from the high school affiliated with the Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana in Medellín. My mom, as punishment, decided that from then on I would have to pay for my own studies. I enrolled in a boarding school in Marinilla, a small town near Medellín. To pay for it, I went to the El Colombiano newspaper and told them: ‘I am a painter.’ Imagine the audacity. I asked them to let me illustrate the cultural supplement. I used to go down to Medellin every Saturday by bus to get the articles and poems and would spend all day Sunday illustrating them. I would then catch the last bus and go back to Marinilla. With the money I got from these drawings, I paid for boarding school, which included food and accommodation. It didn’t cost very much, but it was a lot for my means.”

The days of hardship are long past for Botero. His works of art are valued in the millions of dollars. Last year, Christie’s sold his 1979 painting “Los músicos” for $2.03 million, the highest price ever paid for a work by a living Latin American artist.

Perhaps to prevent his work from becoming accessible only to the elite, Fernando Botero has donated dozens of artworks to his country’s museums. In addition, in 1999, he gave Colombia his private art collection of 80 paintings, including work by Monet, Chagall, Dali, Renoir, Picasso, Tolouse-Lautrec, Giacometti, Henry Moore and Miró, among others. The Botero donation, as it is called in artistic circles, is valued at more than $250 million, a gesture of generosity about which Botero prefers not to comment:

“I have been very pleased by the warm reception of the people visiting the museum. I have been told it is the most frequently visited museum in Colombia.”

Given all of this, there is something singularly heroic about Fernando Botero’s attitude.

At the age of 75, with a secure place in the history of art, enjoying a well-deserved and immense fortune and sitting at the table of European aristocracy, Botero is capable of risking his prestige and comfort to rise before the horror and paint his colossal protest.

Daniel Coronell is an award-winning Colombian journalist and Senior Scholar at CLAS.
Early in the last century oil baron Edward Doheny created a surreal garden to adorn the grounds of his California mansion: a tropical rainforest in the middle of the arid Los Angeles basin. There, he housed exotic specimens collected on trips to his oil fields in the state of Veracruz, Mexico. But what became of the real rainforest?

Before 1900, Veracruz was home to the northernmost tropical rainforest on the American continent. Also known as the Huasteca Veracruzana, the region was the first site of oil production in Mexico as well as the first tropical rainforest in the world to experience oil extraction. At that time, the local population included families of old Spanish stock, the *hacendado* elite; mestizo small ranchers; and the *Teenek*, distant cousins of the Maya, also known as Huastecos, who owned land communally.

Foreign oil extraction, which began in 1900 and lasted until 1938, drastically altered both the ecological and social make-up of the region. Domination of the area by American and European oil companies transformed land tenure patterns, land use, social composition and social structures. The oil industry created its own web of life — an ecology of oil — that changed both the relationships among humans and the relationship between humans and their local environment.

The first change the companies brought to the Huasteca was a shift in land tenure patterns. The oil barons introduced a new concept to the area: the commodification of land. For the first time in local history the rainforest had a price and could be leased, bought or sold. The *hacendados* jumped at the opportunity to make business deals, happy to make money in quantities never before seen. The *Teenek* were not so sure. They had been fighting against individualizing property since Mexican independence in the early 19th century, distrustful of promises of riches that seldom materialized. Many *Teenek* heads of household refused to sell.

The companies increased the size of their offers, unleashing speculation and a land grab without precedent in the history of the region. Some *Teenek* sold out. Those who would not suffered the consequences. They were ambushed and killed by strangers, stabbed or shot in suspicious brawls. Illiterate widows received condolences from company land agents and were pressured to sign on the dotted line, losing their patrimony. By the 1920s, foreign oil companies controlled about 46 percent of the Huasteca.

Control over the rainforest led to the second radical transformation in the ecology of oil: change in land use patterns. Before 1900, the *hacendados* raised cattle in the forest with great difficulty. The *Teenek* planted corn in small patches and exploited the rainforest for their needs. That changed with oil production. The industry required infrastructure: roads, pipelines, pumping stations, storage tanks, refineries (14 total in the region), factories, housing, workshops, telegraph lines and, by the early 1920s, airplane landing strips. Infrastructure alone covered vast areas of the rainforest. Then there were the wells and the spills they caused.

Between 1904 and 1938, it rained oil in the Huasteca. Forests, mangroves, swamps, marshes, sand dunes and everything in between were blanket ed in oil at one point or another. The oil companies didn’t lay out pipelines until they could be sure of a return on their investment. Freshly discovered oil spewed out of
the land until the pipelines were finished, creating open oil pits, or “dams” from seven to 30 feet deep. By 1918, there were 66 oil pools in the Huasteca. The result of oil extraction, therefore, was dramatic pollution. By 1920, for example, the Tampico Chamber of Commerce complained of losing the Gulf Coast beaches. Waves carried oil and dumped it on the sand; beachgoers could neither swim nor sunbathe. Rivers, streams, estuaries, lagoons, lakes and other bodies of water along the Mexican Gulf were contaminated as well.

Numerous wells also caught fire. The worst conflagration took place at Well #3 in San Diego de la Mar, which spurted a black column of oil and burst into flames on the Fourth of July, 1908. The explosion was so large that the earth sank and left gaping holes like two mouths. The place has been known as “Dos Bocas” ever since. The fire lasted 57 days; nothing could put it out. The black cloud of smoke could be seen from miles away; sailors at sea in the Gulf of Mexico read by the glow of the fire. In Tampico, 65 miles north, it rained black ink as the cinders dissolved and fell on city streets.

Dos Bocas remains the largest oil spill and fire in history: about 420 million gallons of oil buried 30 square miles of forest, swamps, mangroves and marshes in oil. By comparison, the 1989 Exxon Valdez spill was 10.8 million gallons and the 1991 Gulf War spills and fires lost 240 million gallons. When the fire burned itself out, a toxic lake remained. Poisonous gases rose in clouds from its waters. One hundred years later, the lake is still there; the environment has not recovered. Neither has the rainforest: by 1938, it was gone, never to return.

The labor force needed to make these changes possible did not exist in the Huasteca, so the companies had to import it, thus changing the social composition of the region. The oil barons recruited Mexican men by the thousands. At the peak of employment in 1921 there were some 40,000 men on the payroll. That great influx meant that the local population — specifically, the Teenek — were totally marginalized. Socially, economically and politically, they were dwarfed by the sheer numbers of immigrants.

The oil companies also introduced new hierarchies to what used to be agrarian societies. They organized the labor force according to color, race and nationality. The top layer of executives and managers were white Americans or Europeans. The drillers and other skilled workers

Dos Bocas, still toxic nearly 100 years later.
were foreign, too. These top layers of employment were forbidden to Mexicans, who did the manual labor, as formal discrimination was inscribed in the social organization of the oil industry. Furthermore, the companies created in Mexico the same system of segregation that existed in the United States with whites-only housing, dining halls, infirmaries, social clubs, swimming pools and other facilities.

The segregation, discrimination and racism used as organizing principles by the oil companies had an impact on the relationship between men and nature. The executives hunted, fished and collected “exotic” rainforest plants and animals. They fancied themselves masters of nature and masters of men. The workers, by contrast, felt the brunt of an inhospitable environment. Relegated to crowded housing built up against the wells and refineries, the migrants caught malaria, tuberculosis, yellow fever and smallpox in addition to suffering numerous accidents and being routinely exposed to toxic chemicals on the job. Thus the ecology of oil meant that the human experience of nature and the environment depended on class status. The lower in the social hierarchy a worker was, the higher the risks of adverse environmental effects on health and body.

As a result of such social and environmental conditions, oil workers became one of the most radical segments of the Mexican working class. They positioned themselves on the left wing of the revolutionary movement that began sweeping through Mexico in 1910. They developed a scathing critique of the oil barons and capitalism in general, raising the issue of nationalization with President Lázaro Cárdenas before he was ready to consider it.

Between 1936 and 1938, the union and the companies fought hard over the first collective bargaining contract in the industry. It was a violent confrontation that paralyzed the industry throughout the country for the first time ever, prompting the Supreme Court to resolve the issue. When the Court ruled in favor of the workers on March 1, 1938, the companies announced they would not comply with the ruling — Mexican law did not apply to them. Faced with foreign companies who openly flouted Mexican law and the prospect of a second nationwide oil strike, President Cárdenas nationalized the industry on March 19, 1938. That decision made Cárdenas the most popular president in Mexican history to date. Yet he did not make that decision alone. The oil workers also deserve credit. Their militancy had made that decision possible. It was their victory, too.

Myrna Santiago is Associate Professor of History and Director of the Women’s Studies Program at St. Mary’s College. She spoke at CLAS on March 5, 2007.
The Persistence of Peronism

By Veronica Herrera

Despite 24 years of procedural democracy, Argentina continues to face a central challenge to its democratic development: an uncompetitive party system. Given that there are few viable electoral alternatives to the dominant Peronist party, a competitive party system seems elusive. But the Argentine sociologist Torcuato S. Di Tella finds reason to remain hopeful.

The Peronist movement redefined Argentina in 1946, forever changing the political trajectory of the country. During his CLAS talk, Di Tella, one of Argentina’s leading analysts on Latin American party systems and former National Secretary of Culture, argued that only by examining the history of Peronism can we understand the current party system and its prospects for reform. Under what conditions did Peronism emerge? What explains its enduring legacy?

At the turn of the century, Argentina seemed destined to become a regional leader. Early industrialization attracted a large influx of European immigrants, and the country’s population grew sevenfold from 1887 to 1930. Argentina enjoyed increasing economic prosperity by exporting grains and high end products such as beef and leather goods. The conservative elites who dominated these industries ensured their own political survival through the electoral fraud that dominated Argentine politics until 1916. It was then that their traditional rivals, the Radicals, won control of the presidency with the election of Hipólito Yrigoyen. The first of many military coups ended Yrigoyen’s administration and returned the conservatives to power. This tension between military power and popular democracy was a fitting backdrop for the rise of the iconic populist, Juan Domingo Perón.

Although Perón was himself a colonel, his relationship with the military was tenuous at best. Perón was a key player in the United Officer’s Group, a secret society that overthrew the Conservative administration in 1943. As minister of labor under the new regime, Perón became attuned to the demands of the working class. Soon Perón’s concessions to labor were seen as a threat to the military, leading to his imprisonment in 1945. Shortly thereafter, mass demonstrations organized by the Argentine labor confederation forced Perón’s release from prison. He won the 1946 presidential election with the support of an electoral coalition composed of both the working class and middle sectors. Mobilizing the working class produced a tension with the military and conservative factions that would plague both Peronism and the nation’s politics for the remainder of the 20th century.

Despite the mobilization of the poor by Perón and...
his wife, Eva, the former colonel’s initial inspiration was the fascist model that seemed to be prospering in Italy. At the time, fascism had many attractions: the promise of industrialization, nationalist protection of the economy and a militarized state capable of maintaining social order. While Perón admired Mussolini, he favored the Latin American variant: Mexican populist and PRI founder Lázaro Cárdenas. Perón understood that he needed support from the masses. Ultimately, the populist component of Peronism prevailed over its fascist inclinations; Peronism was decisively a working class party that ushered in the rise of mass politics in Argentina.

During the next 40 years Argentine politics became known as the “impossible game.” In 1954, the Catholic Church, incensed over Perón’s legalization of divorce, allied with conservative military factions to bomb Buenos Aires in a failed coup d'état. A year later, a successful coup forced Perón from power, and the Peronist party was banned. But one central problem remained: Perón’s followers made up roughly half of the voting electorate. Barred from participating in politics, the Peronist party was moved out of the electoral system and into the only remaining channel of representation: organized labor. In theory, Peronism was the same type of working class party as the PRI in Mexico or Social Democrat variants in Europe. In practice however, the ban on Peronism radicalized the movement. In this context, Peronism became a weakly institutionalized party led by the strongest labor movement in Latin America.

In the following decades, Argentines experienced multiple military coups, punctuated by the occasional Peronist return to power. Throughout this time the old antagonism between the military and the labor movement continued to dominate the political scene. The military coups attempted to eradicate the left, and the left would occasionally fight back through the Montoneros, a leftwing Peronist guerilla group, or through civil resistance of their own. Such antagonism led to the most violent encounter between these two enemies: the Dirty War of the 1970s in which approximately 30,000 Argentines were “disappeared” by the military government. Violence and instability greatly undermined Argentine political institutions, even as civil society united against military brutality.

Peronism continues to enjoy a fundamental and enduring legacy in Argentine politics. Whether this legacy can become a stabilizing force for the nation’s party system remains to be seen given the party’s recent ideological incoherence and lack of party discipline. Carlos Menem, the first post-dictatorship Peronist president, began his term in 1989 with many promises to the working class. However, he soon came to represent an entirely new type of Peronist:
an economic conservative who undertook sweeping market reforms and allied with the right. In 2003, the Peronist party was so divided that three ideologically diverse presidential hopefuls were allowed to run, unofficially, as Peronist candidates.

Today, the party again holds the presidency under Néstor Kirchner who represents a center-left Peronist coalition. Kirchner enjoys a popularity rating of 70 percent and will likely be reelected if he runs for office this November. The Peronist legacy endures, but is it the only game in town?

Di Tella acknowledged that the Radicals, the only potential electoral alternative, have rarely been able to mobilize a coalition that could challenge the Peronists. Although the Radical Raúl Alfonsín was elected president after the collapse of the military junta in 1983, opposition from the labor movement limited his policy options. During Alfonsín’s six-year presidency, the Argentine labor confederation organized a total of 13 general strikes. Later, the Radicals formed an electoral coalition that won the 1999 elections only to be disgraced and driven from office in the disastrous economic and political crisis of 2001. The nation’s economy has since begun to recover, but what are the prospects for a more competitive party system?

Di Tella admitted that the Peronists continue to dominate Argentine politics, adding that the right has much to do if it hopes to see the presidential palace in the near future. He argued that an electoral coalition between top business leaders and labor is unsustainable and that this central class division continues to define Argentine politics. The primary unifying element for the anti-Peronist camp is the fact that they oppose the Peronists. Whether such a factor will mobilize enough support for a viable electoral coalition to win the presidency in November’s election seems unlikely. Di Tella remained optimistic, however, that Argentina was headed down a path toward becoming a “serious country,” capable of managing the economy and peacefully alternating power between political parties. However, one does not need to be clairvoyant to predict that the Peronists will continue to play a key role in Argentine politics for many years to come.

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Labor organizations appear to be at a crossroads in Latin America. During the 20th century, many countries adopted an economic strategy of import-substitution industrialization (ISI), which forged positive relationships between labor-based parties and unions. Parties seeking electoral support from workers would promote benefits for labor within the political arena, and trade unions would use their organizational strength to deliver votes. In this way, labor-based political parties and trade unions were the primary intermediaries between citizens and the state.

However, a sharp turn towards market-based or neoliberal economic reform during the 1980s and 1990s strained these links. Leftist parties have reduced capacity to make programmatic appeals along class lines, and workers are increasingly atomized and located in the informal sector. How have unions responded to this changed economic climate? What policy successes have they been able to achieve, and what challenges do unions face?

Kjeld Jakobsen addressed these questions with respect to Brazil’s main labor union, the Central Unica dos Trabalhadores (CUT). Given his current position as International Secretary for the municipality of São Paulo and his 12 years as a member of the CUT Executive, Jakobsen was able to provide rich insights into the challenges that the Brazilian trade union movement currently faces.

Jakobsen began by noting that although leftist governments have recently been elected to office across the Latin American continent, neoliberal economic policies remain firmly in place. In many respects, leftist governments have not made major changes to economic policy primarily because it is not clear in which direction change should be made. Within Brazil, market-based policies have brought concrete benefits in some areas and have fallen short in others. Over the past four years, exports and real wages increased, 1.3 million jobs were created in the formal labor sector and inflation was kept firmly under control. However, interest rates remained high, and while GDP grew an average of 2–3 percent per year, this represents fairly sluggish economic performance relative to other Latin American countries, let alone China. As a result, there is little consensus regarding the direction of future economic policy.

Moreover, having the Workers’ Party (PT) in power
at the executive level does not automatically translate into labor friendly reforms. President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva’s roots in the labor movement have made him personally sympathetic to the movement’s goals, yet the realities of governing at the national level ensure that no one interest group can monopolize policymaking. In addition, recent political scandals have crippled the Brazilian government’s ability to enact policy change of any kind. From 2004, when illegal funding of political campaigns was first detected, through the 2006 presidential elections, it was nearly impossible for the Brazilian parliament to enact major legislation.

The trade union movement has also faced significant challenges in terms of influencing economic and social policy. During the 1990s, over 3 million industrial sector jobs were lost. Today, almost 50 percent of Brazilian workers labor in the informal sector. As unions lost members, their political influence was diminished. However, Jakobsen argued that these challenges have not substantially weakened labor’s effectiveness as a political actor. Rivalries among trade unions within Brazil have largely subsided, as evidenced by the fact that all national labor confederations supported Lula’s candidacy during the second round of presidential elections. While differences among trade unions certainly exist, they do not stand in the way of labor acting as a unified political force.

Organizing workers in the informal sector of the economy is a more pressing challenge and one that trade unions across Latin America are struggling to confront. Jakobsen suggested that one possible solution might be to focus on the vertical chain of production; in other words, to hold multinational “parent” companies responsible for the labor rights violations of their subcontractors. In this way, organized labor can use its influence to improve conditions for nonunionized informal contract workers.

Despite these challenges and despite a sluggish first term with respect to labor law reform, Jakobsen remained optimistic that change is possible. Lula gained 62 percent of the vote in the second round, and the PT gained more state offices than ever before. There appears to be little doubt that Lula has a legitimate mandate from the majority, and he has recently declared that he will govern on behalf of all, but with particular emphasis on the needs of the poorest.

Some issues to watch, according to Jakobsen, are negotiations over the minimum wage as well as efforts to bring labor law in line with conventions laid out in international treaties. A coalition of trade unions has proposed a formula for increasing the minimum wage annually (adding the yearly inflation rate to a percentage of GDP growth.) The intention is for the minimum wage to attain sufficient value so that workers at the bottom of the income scale can still earn enough to meet their basic needs. As details of the various proposals unfold, negotiations surrounding the minimum wage are likely to be among the most contentious of Lula’s second term.

Additionally, one casualty of the stagnant legislative environment was the labor law reform that gave employers the advantage in labor-management disputes. At present, if employees decide to strike, business owners can unilaterally appeal to national labor courts to resolve the dispute. This is in violation of Convention 98 laid out by the International Labor Organization, to which Brazil is a signatory. The convention states that a third party, such as national labor courts, can only resolve the dispute if both management and labor agree to such mediation. A proposal to bring Brazilian labor law in accordance with the ILO treaty has been introduced into the legislature, and Jakobsen believes that it will be acted upon during 2007.

Jakobsen closed his talk by discussing various issues that are currently under debate within Brazil’s trade union movement. One important concern is the direction that the economic model should take. While some sectors of the economy prefer to emphasize Brazil’s comparative advantage in exporting commodities, others want to ensure that the country’s capacity for industrial production remains strong. Similarly, most within the union movement agree that ISI is unsustainable at the national level. However, a version of ISI at the continental level — among select Latin American countries — may be one way to achieve regional economic integration while retaining equitable economic growth. On a broader level, Brazilian union members are particularly concerned about achieving a stronger, more consolidated democracy. Economic reforms, while important, are limited in their ability to achieve social justice. Brazil’s trade unions are therefore equally invested in achieving political reform, especially in passing initiatives focused on combating corruption and expanding popular democratic participation. As political reform advances hand-in-hand with economic policy, Jakobsen is confident that Brazil’s social profile will be the beneficiary.

Kjeld Jakobsen’s lecture was held at CLAS on February 8, 2007. Jakobsen was a member of the Central Unica dos Trabalhadores Executive for 12 years. Currently, he is the International Secretary of the municipality of São Paulo.

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I awake to the crowing of a rooster and sink deeper beneath the covers imagining its untimely demise. But the cold has crept into the house during the night so, shivering, I drag myself out of bed in the dim morning light. Outside I breathe in the fresh, thin air and peer through the clouds still settled over San Martín Itunyoso to watch the sun rising over the mountains.

I have been coming to this town since 2004 to do linguistic fieldwork on the local language, Trique (pronounced “tree-key”). Located in the western region of the state of Oaxaca, Mexico, San Martín Itunyoso is perched nearly two miles above sea level in a mountainous region called “La Mixteca.” Clouds do not so much cover the sky here but instead slide from mountain to valley, engulfing huge regions in their cool whiteness.

At this time in the morning, farmers are heading out to start work on their milpas, carrying shovels and water with them. As a linguist I feel obliged to note that “milpa” isn’t easily translated as “farm.” It is indeed a field with corn growing in it, but unlike many farms in the U.S., the herbs and “weeds” that grow around the corn don’t get pulled out. Called quelites in Mexican Spanish, they make up a very important part of the diet of Trique people.

When in San Martín Itunyoso, I stay at a house owned by the brother of my friend Benigno. His brother has been gone for six years, working as a migrant laborer in California. Benigno and I have been working together on his language since I first arrived in 2004. Entering the town wasn’t easy. It is not an area of Oaxaca where tourists are welcomed with open arms. It belongs to one of the poorest regions of one of the poorest states in Mexico. During my time here I have been stared at by children yelling, “kuríngúu!” (“gringo”) and interrogated by those suspicious of my intentions. Rumors have passed through the community alleging that I was earning vast quantities of money selling Trique culture back in the U.S. Over time, I have worked to calm people’s fears regarding my presence.

For three years now Benigno and I have been writing a picture dictionary of the San Martín Itunyoso Trique language. Back in 2004, I thought, albeit naively, that we could complete the work in one summer and subsequently publish the book through the state’s public education institute. The language had never been written, so I felt that a modest project like ours could bring some cultural pride to the community and help people to eventually become literate in their language.

During my fieldwork, I spent time observing and collecting data for my dissertation while also working on the picture dictionary. While there is a scientific method of transcribing the language’s sounds, a picture dictionary must contain a practical orthography that is accessible to its readers.

Most linguists believe that a writing system should be phonemic, where a single letter or symbol represents exactly one sound that is contrastive in the language. For instance, the sounds /l/ and /r/ are contrastive in English, in words like “lip” and “rip.” Since these words have different meanings by virtue of having a different sound, we have good evidence for distinguishing /l/ and /r/ in the language’s writing system. By contrast, there are no words in Japanese that distinguish these two sounds, so they are not written differently.

In order to figure out what letters a writing system needs, one must classify those sounds which contrast meaning in words. So, before I could develop a writing system for Trique, I had to figure out all the different sounds and tones. This required listening to different words elicited from speakers, carefully transcribing slight differences in pronunciation and then repeating the words that I thought had differences in pronunciation to see if they were meaningful. I then grouped words with similar sounds together, asked speakers how they were pronounced and noted if a word in the set sounded markedly different from the others. It was a meticulous process of careful listening, transcription and organization. Depending on the complexity of the language, it can take months or years to do. Since Trique is tonal, the process took me over two years.

A tone language is one where a change in pitch changes the meaning of a particular word. There are nine tones in Trique. Examples of five of the tones are as follows: the word nne with a very low pitch means “naked,” nne with a low pitch means “to lie to someone,” nne with a midlevel pitch means “plough,” nne with a slightly falling pitch means “water,” and nne with a large falling pitch means “meat.” There is no typo here. One pronounces each word with the same consonants and vowels (a long “n” and the vowel “e”),
but with different tones.

Once I figured out which sounds were contrastive, I devised a writing system for the language. Writing systems undergo much revision before they are ever used by speakers. If they are used, they evolve into new forms that uniquely reflect the speakers’ cultural and linguistic concerns. It may be the case that the way I think Trique could be written (from a very systematic, phonological perspective) will be adopted by everyone who speaks the language, but the writing system could also develop into a modified form which retains only parts of what I have conceived it to be.

This past summer I tested out the writing system when I recorded a Trique story “Chube nga Cha’yanj” (“The Dog and the Coyote”). Although it took several days to record the story and learn the meaning of each word and sentence, piece by piece, it was worth it. When it was complete I gave it to speakers of the language whom I work with. While it was difficult for them to read their language for the first time, a few were able to make out sentences very clearly. However, their real test was in asking me to read it (repeatedly). If they could understand me, then it had been written well.

Fortunately I passed the test. Trique people thought it was very strange that a white person was speaking their language, but they understood me.

Writing down the story and working on the picture-dictionary made me reevaluate some of my goals as a linguist. If I were only to have explored issues related to my thesis, I would have missed the opportunity to offer something back to the speakers of a language without any resources. I would not have learned as many words or gotten to know as many people in the community. Because I was able to combine my research with culturally-relevant projects, my purpose became clear to the townspeople. My obligation to Trique speakers has been to use whatever knowledge I have to give them something they might use for themselves. That way I am no longer just a strange kuringúu in their town in the clouds, but a kuringúu with a purpose that includes them.

Christian DiCanio is a graduate student in the Linguistics Department at UC Berkeley. He received a Tinker grant from CLAS in the summer of 2006 to conduct his field research.
In the opening scene of “Manda Bala,” director Jason Kohn’s much-lauded new documentary about social corruption in Brazil, we are introduced to a “frog farmer.” The farmer jokes, over the din of croaks emitting from frog-filled vats arrayed behind him in the sun, that he loves his amphibious flock more than he loves his wife. “She told me,” he explains with a ready smile: “you choose the frogs, or you choose me; I chose the frogs.” Moments after he makes this crack, however, we watch the farmer’s mood darken. When his off-camera interlocutor asks him about a scandal involving this, the largest frog farm in the world, the color drops from his face. After a few beats’ silence our farmer recovers his cheer, but says only that o escândalo isn’t something he can really discuss.

By the end of Kohn’s film, which the director presented at a special Berkeley screening sponsored by the Center for Latin American Studies, we’ve learned all about the scandal (a scheme to launder ill-got public funds through the farm’s private commerce in frogs’ legs). In watching “Manda Bala,” however, it becomes quickly clear that the film’s chief aim is not to trace the lineaments of any particular crime. It is rather to explore the larger context in which thievery takes place — to explore, that is, both the underlying causes for endemic iniquity and the fear that crosses the farmer’s face when he’s asked to speak of it. Built around the inspired metaphor of the frog farm, “Manda Bala,” as Kohn put it in a lively post-screening discussion, is a film about “how the rich steal from the poor and how the poor steal from the rich.”
In telling that story, “Manda Bala” (the phrase means “send a bullet,” or, more colloquially, “kill it” in Brazilian Portuguese) is helped along by a brilliant cast of characters: an articulate, ski-masked São Paulo slumlord who makes a living — and paves the streets of his favela — with ransom money from kidnappings; a puffy and paranoid upper-class Paulista who’s spent a small fortune to bullet-proof his Porsche and wants to insert two movement-monitoring microchips (“in case one fails”) into his body; a plastic surgeon with a Jesus complex who’s developed a procedure to reconstruct the severed ears of kidnap victims out of their own rib cartilage. Hovering above them all is Jáder Barbalho, loathsome ex-president of the Brazilian Senate, who’s made his Northeastern state of Pará into a personal fief, funneling nearly $2 billion of public funds earmarked for rural development into offshore bank accounts.

These characters’ relation to one another is often no greater than their shared membership in a violent economy of inequality. Kohn’s film, in accreting images drawn from their individual stories, builds a kinetic portrait of the corruption — moral, economic, political — bred in a society racked with class divides as stark as any on earth: a country whose largest city, São Paolo, possesses more wealth than the rest of South America combined, but contains upwards of 15 million favela-dwellers who survive on little more than scraps — many of them destitute immigrants from the Brazilian Northeast, one of the poorest regions in the hemisphere.

If the means by which “Manda Bala” “makes its points” are subtle, the images it employs to do so are anything but. Mr. Kohn has a fondness for flesh, human and otherwise, the more grotesque the better. He makes memorable use of slithering frogs in plastic buckets; of a surgeon’s scalpel incising the subcutaneous fat of a human torso; even of the grainy police footage of kidnappers sawing off a captive’s ear.

That such images are hard to look at is appropriate. They fit the film’s grim subject-matter and lend it a power that helped it garner not only the Grand Jury Prize for top documentary at the recent Sundance Film Festival but also the festival’s award for outstanding cinematography. “Manda Bala” — which, as first-time director Kohn described, was some five years in the making — is that rare documentary

São Paulo Robin Hood with ski mask.

Former president of the Brazilian Senate, Jader Barbalho.
whose concern with form over content doesn’t diminish its effectiveness as exegesis of its chosen place and time.

The relentless pulse of Brazilian music that punctuates the film’s transitions and paces its scenes augments its aural impact. Indeed the blaring soundtrack, which includes such luminaries as Caetano Veloso, Os Mutantes and Jorge Ben, threatens on occasion to overwhelm what we’re seeing on screen. Like Fernando Meirelles’ “City of God,” Brazil’s most successful cinematic export of late, “Manda Bala” feels at times like a music video, lending the primal glamour of samba to its stylized tale of murder and mayhem.

When asked after the Berkeley screening about prospective U.S. distribution, Kohn explained that gaining licensing permission for all the songs has been difficult. Though one presumes this obstacle will be surmounted and “Manda Bala” will make its way before long to American screens, it’s hard to picture the film being released in Brazil anytime soon. (Its opening credits warn us as much: “Manda Bala’…a film that can’t be shown in Brazil”) Mr. Kohn has said in interviews that a Brazilian release of the film might put himself and his family in danger (the New York-raised director’s mother is Brazilian and his father is a businessman living in São Paulo). Cine-auteurs, of course, aren’t beyond corruption’s reach.

And indeed there are moments in the film itself when one fears for the director’s well-being. In a climactic interview with Barbalho, held at the offices of the potenatate’s television station in Pará’s capital city of Belem, Kohn shifts the conversation from a banal chat about developing the Amazon to ask Barbalho about his role in a certain frog farming venture. Barbalho of course promptly announces the encounter finished and walks out of the room. We do wonder, however, what might befall his impertinent questioner as Barbalho’s lackeys escort Kohn’s crew from the bossman’s lair.

Not that the scandal depicted in “Manda Bala” is breaking news: when Barbalho’s perfidy was made public after a lengthy federal investigation in 2000, he was forced to resign his Senate post. Scarcely two years later, however, the same electorate from whom he’d stolen hundreds of millions of dollars sent Barbalho — who controls not only Belem’s main television and radio stations but also its main newspaper — back to Congress.

As its chief villain’s reelection underscores, this is a film not about correctible wrongdoing but about the corrosive effects of institutionalized corruption. An exemplar both of cinematic style and social realism, “Manda Bala” carries with it a warning, apparent long before its final scenes, but distilled in its concluding images: disembodied mouths gathered about a last supper table slobbering down frogs’ legs glistening with grease; a sink-basin full of tadpoles, the water in which they swim sinking slowly away, the tadpoles squirming blindly against one other as they swirl downwards, each one disappearing, one by one, inexorably down the drain.

Director Jason Kohn presented “Manda Bala” at UC Berkeley on March 23, 2007.

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Before beginning his reading of *Lost City Radio*, author Daniel Alarcón offers a disclaimer, “I didn’t set this novel in Peru. I set this novel in an unnamed Latin American country, in an unnamed Latin American city.” Seconds later, as Alarcón is framing the excerpt he is about to read, he says, “This is about the night the war finally became real in Lima.” Then he pauses and corrects himself, “Not in Lima, in this made-up, fictional city.” Standing before the Peruvian Consul General, Alarcón, winks, “Nothing like this ever happened in Peru.”

*Lost City Radio*, Alarcón’s first novel, chronicles two days in the life of Norma, a news announcer for a national radio program. With thousands missing due to civil war and economic dislocation, Norma’s radio program provides a forum for callers hoping to reconnect with their lost family members, lovers and friends. Ten years prior, Norma’s own husband Rey disappeared during the waning days of the war in a village on the outskirts of the jungle.

The narrative begins when Victor, an 11-year-old boy from the jungle village where Norma’s husband disappeared, arrives at the station with a list of the village’s missing. When Norma recognizes her husband’s nom-de-guerre, she is forced to come to terms with her life, her husband’s secrets and Victor’s mysterious origins — in short, “how that name ended up on that list.” These recollections are told in a series of flashbacks that recreate, in unflinching and unflattering detail, the lives of Norma, Rey and Victor.

Despite his disclaimer, Alarcón readily admits that Peru is the template from which derives his lost city and unnamed country. Like the fictional country, Peru is culturally and geographically divided among poor sierra towns, frontier jungle villages and a sprawling coastal metropolis which...
absorbs internal migrants from those poorer regions. Like the fictional country, Peru was devastated by a violent guerrilla insurgency which sought to remake a corrupt state through a bloody civil war. And, in both cases, when the corrupt state proved victorious, it was ruled by an authoritarian dictator who sought to recast history through an iron-fisted control of the media and political process. The novel evocatively describes the crowded buses, dusty shantytowns and politicized universities that would be familiar to any resident of Lima.

The premise for the novel’s call-in radio show even came from a Peruvian program, “Busca Personas” (“In Search of People”), which functioned as a radio bulletin board for the country’s internally displaced and the people who missed them. Listening to the program, Alarcón heard a Lima characterized by displacement and dislocation, a place “of disintegrating cultural traditions, of people kind of being swallowed up by the city and unable to maintain their ties to the places they used to call home and the people that were their loved ones.” In the novel, Norma attempts a delicate balancing act as she publicly assists citizens unwilling to forget their past in a nation defined by a state-led policy of erasing history.

However much Alarcón draws upon Lima as a prototype for his lost city, he adamantly defends fiction as his preferred medium. Although he first drafted the story as a work of nonfiction, he felt constrained by sticking with the particulars. Alarcón refers to Mario Vargas Llosa’s concept of “la verdad de las mentiras” (“the truth of lies”), to explain how fiction can be a more persuasive, richer means of expressing a true sentiment or situation than mere facts.

Alarcón also seems to have chosen fiction and an anonymous setting to deliberately collectivize the experience of displacement, memory and anger. He began the reading with the mention of a February 2007 New York Times article recounting how a woman from rural Thailand got on the wrong bus, became lost in a city over 750 miles from her hometown and wasn’t reunited with her family until a homeless shelter volunteer thought to attempt speaking with her in Yawi, her indigenous language — 25 years later. In Lost City Radio, languages, places and rural customs are unnamed, numbered or given foreign-sounding but deliberately ambiguous titles.

But perhaps most alarming is Alarcón’s universalizing description of prison and detention policies in a counter-insurgency war. As a university student, Rey is imprisoned for months for traveling on a city bus without his identity papers. While at a detention facility known as “the Moon,” he is forced to bury himself alive. His guards urinate on him. He is abandoned in unsanitary, overcrowded cells. He also meets the contacts who will one day draw him into the guerilla insurgency.

It is several years, however, before Rey is driven to join the rebels. His breaking point comes when his uncle Trini is killed while being detained on trumped-up charges. A few months later, Rey undertakes his first operation as a member of the Illegitimate Legion. From then on, he creates a dual life: as a botany professor and devoted husband in the city and an Illegitimate Legion guerilla in the provinces.

Against this background of fear and uncertainty, “everyone comes off poorly.” Norma, Rey and the supporting characters choose paths that reveal their greatest weaknesses: selfishness, denial, egotism, lust and ambition. Although many willingly pay a penance, often their efforts are too little, too late.

Alarcón’s Lost City Radio is not merely about Peru. It is not just a Latin American novel. Rather, it is a chronicle of moral failure and the struggle for redemption in a society traumatized by dislocation, violence and fear.

2007 Guggenheim Fellow Daniel Alarcón is the author of Lost City Radio and War by Candlelight and the editor of Etiqueta Negra, a Peruvian culture magazine. He read selections from Lost City Radio in an event sponsored by the Center for Latin American Studies on April 16, 2007.

Meredith Perry received her Master of Arts in the Latin American Studies program at Berkeley in May 2007.
Measure

Recurrences.
Coppery light hesitates again in the small-leaved
Japanese plum. Summer and sunset, the peace
of the writing desk

and the habitual peace of writing, these things form an order I only
belong to in the idleness of attention. Last light rims the blue mountain

and I almost glimpse what I was born to, not so much in the sunlight
or the plum tree as in the pulse that forms these lines.

Fernando Botero on the Berkeley campus outside the Free Speech Movement Cafe.