

¡VIVXS LXS QUEREMOS!  
THE BATTLES FOR MEMORY AROUND  
THE DISAPPEARED IN MEXICO

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## **ORIGINALITY STATEMENT**

'I, María De Vecchi Gerli, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.'

Signed:

Date: 10 July 2018

## **DEDICATION**

To my parents, Milagros Gerli and Bruno De Vecchi,  
for being an endless source of inspiration, love and support

To all those looking for their disappeared loved ones,  
with my utmost admiration

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis analyses the battles for memory around the disappeared in Mexico by comparing the two main periods of disappearances, this is the period between the 1960s-1980s and that from the mid-2000s onwards. Following a critical ethnography methodology with a psychosocial approach the thesis analyses memory realms (dates, categories used to name disappearances and memorials) created by memory entrepreneurs. The thesis focuses mainly on seven organisations of relatives of the disappeared. The contexts of the two periods mark the battles for memory. In the first period, framed by the government's attack on political opponents, the relatives emphasised the state's responsibility in the disappearances, and insisted on the liberation of the disappeared. The response of state actors was marked by denial and silence. The transitional justice measures taken during the change of government in 2000 perpetrated impunity and silence about disappearances. The second period is framed by the so-called 'War on Drugs', and is also inserted in a context where human rights discourses and institutions set a path for the relationships between the government and the relatives of the disappeared. Thus, relatives of the disappeared make specific demands to the government using a human rights discourse, whilst state actors fail to acknowledge the extent of the phenomenon and mainly blame disappearances on organised crime. Finally, the thesis analyses the impact of the enforced disappearance of 43 Ayotzinapa students on the broader issue of disappearances. This case had an effect of making other cases less prominent, whilst making the broader phenomenon of disappearances more visible. The low social will to remember, which has been a constant during the two periods, changed around this case. In a context where more than 37,000 persons are disappeared in Mexico, this thesis contributes to the necessity of understanding past and present disappearances.

Keywords: Memory, disappearances, enforced disappearances, Mexico, memorials, human rights, transitional justice.

## IMPACT STATEMENT

This thesis examines the battles for memory around the disappeared in Mexico, analysing the two main periods in which these crimes have been committed and the relationships between the organisations of relatives of the disappeared and state actors from the 1970s onwards. The findings of this thesis could be directly put to beneficial use both in the academic and non-academic fields.

In terms of academia, scholars around the world have studied the battles for memory around the disappeared and around state violence more broadly in Latin America and elsewhere. Within this academic production, the Mexican case has been neglected. This thesis then contributes to an ongoing debate over memory studies in the region and beyond. In the last years, there has been an increase in the mobilisation around disappearances and in the memorialisation around the disappeared in Mexico. As the first in-depth study in this matter, this thesis provides an overview of the current state of affairs, which will be most useful for those studying this topic in the future.

According to official figures, at least thirteen persons disappeared every day in Mexico during 2016. The disappearance crisis has been acknowledged by international human rights bodies such as the United Nations Working Group on Enforced and Involuntary Disappearances and the UN Committee on Enforced Disappearances. In the national arena, a new Law on Enforced Disappearances and Disappearances Committed by Private Citizens was sanctioned in 2017. The topic of disappearances in Mexico is then more relevant than ever. This thesis will provide historical background on such cases to those looking to intervene on disappearances, as well as a specific analysis of how disappearances affect the lives of relatives of the disappeared. This work will also provide insight on memorials and dates in which the meanings of disappearances are in dispute. These topics will be useful for human rights organisations, state actors, international humanitarian bodies, and international governments wanting to comprehend and act upon the disappearance crisis in Mexico.

The findings of this thesis, which will be accessible through academic and non-academic publications, could serve as a basis for public policies, human rights debates, etc. Besides this, being a unique study on memory and disappearances in Mexico, it could be included in curricula on this topic. As an expert on this topic, the author could also contribute in mainstream media debates on human rights in Mexico and on disappearances. Furthermore, this expertise could serve to develop and deliver training in this topic for national and international public servants. In the same regard, the expertise developed during the writing of this thesis could help people in the arts working on human rights and disappearances in Mexico and elsewhere.

As I have shown, given its focus on a current and important topic, the findings of this research will be able to impact the academic and non-academic fields, serving as an important study for a diverse range of people in different sectors.

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## NOTE ON LANGUAGE

Throughout the thesis, I will use the 'x' instead of an 'o' when including words in plural in Spanish. The use of 'x', 'e' or '@' as an alternative to the masculine 'o' –e.g. desaparecidxs, desaparecidas or desaparecid@s as an alternative of desaparecidos- makes visible the feminine and the gender neutral that also conform the plural form and that are not represented in the plural masculine. Although this is not a formal rule, its use has increased among academics and human rights activists in Latin America over the last years as a way to challenge the way in which different experiences are made invisible through language when using a masculine plural (M.V 2016; H. I. J. O. S. México 2017; Milian 2017).

I use the expression 'returned alive' or 'back alive' all through this thesis as it better reflects what the relatives are demanding, emphasising the status in which they expect their relatives to return. See Chapter 2 for the importance of this demand.

Following the ways in which the organisations of relatives of the disappeared refer to them, I frequently use the term 'loved ones' (seres queridxs). This form of naming them has been replicated in national and international media and, more importantly for this work, in academic works in the field (Villalón 2017; Lessa 2013; Buck 2017; Aviña 2014; Phillips and Reyes 2011; Beristain 2012). This concept recognises the affective ties (beside kinship), as a central element to explain the great amounts of energy and resources invested in searching for the disappeared. This does not mean that those persons who are not actively and publicly looking for their relatives do not have this love relationship. The fear of reprimand, as well as not knowing where or how to search are important factors not to publicly look for someone who has been disappeared.

Likewise, I speak of the relatives of the disappeared who are looking for their kin, but even whilst in the majority of cases it is the relatives who look for the disappeared persons, there are people who, without a relationship of kin, also form part of organisations that work against disappearances. I analyse the social dimension of disappearances in chapter 2, and the membership of such groups in chapter 4.

All the translations from Spanish to English in the thesis are the author's.

A list of acronyms can be found in Appendix 1.

## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Disappearances in Mexico

A big, red, ten-feet-high +43 monument in the iconic Paseo de la Reforma memorialises the 43 students who were forcibly disappeared in September 2014 in Guerrero, Mexico, and the thousands of persons who, like them, are still disappeared in the country.<sup>1</sup> Below the sign, the slogan ‘¡Porque vivos se los llevaron! ¡Vivos los queremos!’ (They took them alive! We want them back alive!), speaks of the struggles that relatives of the disappeared have engaged in for decades to demand from the Mexican government the return alive of women and men whose whereabouts are unknown. This anti monument is just one of the many ways in which the disappeared are remembered in Mexico.

Enforced disappearances are a long-standing problem in Mexico, where according to official figures more than 37,000 people are missing and, as Amnesty International has argued, those responsible enjoy ‘almost absolute impunity’ (Amnesty International 2017a).<sup>2</sup> Disappearances in Mexico received attention in the national and international public sphere after the enforced disappearance of 43 students from the Rural Teaching College ‘Raúl Isidro Burgos’ of Ayotzinapa, Guerrero. However, this is a decades-long problem. State actors have resorted to enforced disappearances as part of a repertoire of political repression in Mexico at least since 1969; the year in which the first enforced disappearance for political reasons was documented by organisations working against this crime. The Eureka Committee and Sons and Daughters for Identity and Justice against Oblivion and Silence (Hijos por la Identidad y la Justicia contra el Olvido y el Silencio, H.I.J.O.S. México)<sup>3</sup> identify 1969 as the year when enforced disappearance was first used to deal with political opponents. In May 19, 1969, military officials kidnapped Epifanio Avilés Rojas, a teacher with links to the Revolutionary National Civic Association (Asociación Cívica Nacional Revolucionaria, ACNR) from his home in Guerrero. It is known that he was taken to Mexico City’s Military Camp No.1. Since then, his whereabouts have remained unknown. Scholars such as González, Montemayor and Castellanos, among others, have used the 1969 date, as it is the first fully documented case. Nonetheless, Poniatowska mentions that disappearances occurred even before 1967 in the context of other social struggles, without giving further details (Montemayor Romo de Vivar 2010; González Villarreal 2012; Poniatowska 1980, 45; Castellanos 2007).

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<sup>1</sup> According to official data, an average of 13 persons were disappeared every day during 2016 (Salazar 2017).

<sup>2</sup> Mexico has been catalogued as a country with systematic and endemic impunity with rates of over 99%. Only in 1% of the cases of disappearances there is a judicial enquiry. See Daniela Rea’s book for histories of impunity and mistreatment in cases of human rights violations in Mexico (Bargent n.d.; ‘MEXICO COUNTRY VISIT – April 21 – May 2, 2014’ 2014; Tuckman 2015a; Committee on Enforced Disappearances 2015; “Generalized Disappearances” in Mexico: UN Committee’ n.d.; Tuckman 2011; Gonzalez n.d.).

<sup>3</sup> Unless stated otherwise, I will refer to H.I.J.O.S. México as H.I.J.O.S. across the thesis. As clarified in Gatti, H.I.J.O.S.’s acronym spells ‘children’ in Spanish (Gatti 2014, 43).

There are, as I will argue in this thesis, two main periods of enforced disappearances in Mexico.<sup>4</sup> The first period started in 1969 and continued until the 1980s. During that period, this form of repression was used by the Mexican government as a means to deal with political opponents. The data gathered by organisations and by the government reveal that between 275 and 1300 people were disappeared in this period. The Eureka Committee and H.I.J.O.S. report nearly 600 people disappeared during the first period, whilst the Association of Relatives of Detained Disappeared in Mexico (Asociación de Familiares de Detenidos Desaparecidos en México, AFADEM) reports around 1,300. On the other hand, official numbers for these disappearances go from 275, according to the National Human Rights Commission's (Comisión Nacional de Derechos Humanos, CNDH) report, to 436, according to the Special Attorney for the Attention of Probably Constitutive Facts of Federal Crimes Committed Directly or Indirectly by Public Servers Against People Involved in Social and Political Movements of the Past (Fiscalía especial para la atención de hechos probablemente constitutivos de delitos federales cometidos directa o indirectamente por servidores públicos en contra de personas vinculadas con movimientos sociales y políticos del pasado, FEMOSPP) (H.I.J.O.S. Mexico n.d.; Doyle n.d.; Comisión Nacional de los Derechos Humanos n.d.; AFADEM 2000).<sup>5</sup>

In Mexico as well as elsewhere in Latin America, this period between the 1960s and 1980s has commonly been called 'the Dirty War'. As Feierstein explains, this term responds to a logic in which two armies regarded as equivalent parts are in confrontation, and some 'dirty' tactics are used by one side to defeat the other. It is a term that corresponds to the way in which the state has explained the events: there was a war and all the available resources had to be used to protect the nation. As Calveiro explains in a video by Octubre19, this was not a war but a process of repression and extermination of an enemy, and calling it 'dirty' hides the use of practices that are illegal even during war. Because of its lack of precision and for being ideologically charged, I do not use this category in this thesis (Feierstein 2016; OCTUBRE19 2017).

The second period of enforced disappearances started in 2006. These disappearances are a consequence of the violence in the context of former President Felipe Calderón's (2006-2012) so-called 'War on Drugs' (and President Enrique Peña Nieto's (2012-2018) continuation of that policy). The number of people disappeared to date is more than 37,000, according to official data. The difficulties in gathering reliable data on the number of people disappeared is dealt with in Chapter 5 (F. Martínez 2018).

Just like 'Dirty War', the term 'War on Drugs' is controversial. At the beginning of his mandate, Calderón and his team used this category when talking about counternarcotic operations. After the crisis of human rights violations and the public outrage when Calderón named the victims 'collateral damages' the governmental discourse changed and the President denied having used the term 'war'. Landman explains how labelling the struggle against organised crime a 'War on Drugs' results in a

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<sup>4</sup> The historical context of enforced disappearances is analysed in depth in Chapter 3.

<sup>5</sup> Both the CNDH and FEMOSPP's reports will be dealt with in following chapters.

sustained pattern of human rights violations: police and armed forces are used as if they were fighting a war where individual guarantees are relaxed. A second problem with this term has been the weight given to drugs. Criminal organisations have expanded their business to human trafficking, money laundering, kidnapping, and extortion. Nonetheless, the governmental operations seem to be focused mainly on drug trafficking. Moreover, some authors, such as Fazio and Mercille, have stated that the current 'War on Drugs' has been also used as a cover for counterinsurgency practices, for repressing opponents and for the control over natural resources (C. Bravo n.d., n.d.; Landman 2012, 100, 111; E. Guerrero 2012; Fazio 2008; Mercille 2011). For these reasons, whenever possible I will refer to this period of disappearances as those occurred after the mid-2000s instead of using the category 'War on Drugs'.

It is important to emphasise that state actors have carried out enforced disappearances and state-sponsored terrorism throughout the last five decades. However, this dissertation focuses on the two periods when disappearances were committed on a greater scale and across the country. Between these two periods, an important human rights issue that drew international attention was the disappearance and femicide of women in the north of the country, particularly in the state of Chihuahua (Wright 2011; Torres Trucios 2008; Toledo Vásquez 2009). Fregoso recounts the history of how this phenomenon became an example of human rights violations against women with international repercussions (Fregoso 2006). Along with the disappeared and killed women, there are also the horrors that people (mainly from Central America) face while trying to reach the United States crossing through Mexico. The disappearance of migrants is also a problematic that has become increasingly public in the last years, with groups of mothers travelling from Central America and across the country searching for their disappeared sons and daughters every year ('Movimiento Migrante Mesoamericano' n.d.; Robledo Silvestre n.d.).

In the two periods analysed in this thesis, relatives of the disappeared organised to search for their loved ones, creating collectives and groups with which to carry out their struggle. In many cases with the support of human rights organisations, they have worked against disappearances, demanding that local and federal governments return the disappeared and put an end to disappearances. These interactions are marked by disputes on who are the disappeared, on what has happened to them, and on who is responsible for committing disappearances. These crimes have been committed for almost five decades, directly impacting tens of thousands of persons. However, they are an understudied topic that is slowly gaining more attention in the academic field.

## **1.2 Theoretical Framework and Contributions**

This thesis' main objective is to analyse the battles for memory around disappearances in Mexico and to understand the continuities and ruptures between the two periods of disappearances in the country. In this section, I present the relevant theoretical framework of memory studies scholarship used to this



end. First, I consider the history of memory studies. I then introduce the main discussions present in this field, and review the main concepts that will inform the analyses in this thesis. After this, I introduce the particularities of the Mexican case and what this case can offer to broader debates on memory studies. Finally, I present the existing scholarship on memory and violence in Mexico, and the contribution of this thesis to the field.

Memory Studies is a prolific field of study 'touching nearly every academic field in the humanities and the social sciences' (Lessa 2013, 15). Halbwachs' 'Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire' (1925) and 'On Collective Memory' (1950) are widely recognised as a foundation for memory studies. His understanding of memory as a collective, rather than an individual process, deeply marked the field. For some authors, the two World Wars and the Holocaust are a starting point to think about memory (Lessa 2013; Serbin 2006). Some scholars have seen the Holocaust as a limit event in which the necessity of understanding the horror made memory studies relevant (Kansteiner 2002; Serbin 2006; Huysen 2003). During the 1960s, in the context of decolonisation and of a search for new understandings of history, and triggered by the Holocaust experience, scholars started to study not only the traumatic past, but also the reactions from the survivors and from different governments, as well as the proliferation of memory narratives in general (Huysen 2003). The genocide experiences in Kosovo, Rwanda and Bosnia, and the experiences of state repression and its reactions in Latin America generated a second wave of memory studies in the 1980s and 1990s (Lessa 2013; Drinot 2009a). This second period of memory studies is still unfolding, penetrating the social sciences and humanities (Lessa 2013).

A first step to analysing memories is defining what we understand them to be. Memory can be understood as how facts are remembered and even interpreted (Grandin 2000). In this understanding, memory would be subjective, handed down experience (P. Smith 2001). Following Huysen, we can say that history and memory are related, and the on-going debate of their relationship is also a debate on what history and memory can offer for the future (Huysen 2003). For Nora, memory is dialectic, living, changing. For him, the 'realms of memory' (further discussed below), which guide the analysis of memorials and dates in this thesis, are a result of the pull and push between memory and history (Nora 1989). The relationship between memories and historical truths is a struggle, insofar as historical truths have been constructed with the winners' accounts of what 'really' happened, so memories serve to fight those representations (Jelin 2003b). Thinking of memory and history in this dichotomy might be helpful for some analysis but as I will show below and throughout this thesis there are also memories advanced from those in power to counter other more radical memories.

Memory is also marked by those other concepts with which it is related. In this regard, the dichotomies of memory-oblivion or memory-forgetting, memory-silence, and discourse-silence have to be examined (Erlil 2011; Huysen 2003; Jelin 2003b; Lessa 2013; Robben 2005b; P. Smith 2001; Theidon 2003; Bilbija and Payne 2011). Even when memory and forgetting are generally thought of

as two separate things, they are in fact two sides of the same coin. Memory is the tension between remembering and forgetting: every memory is forgetting because it is a decision of what to keep and what to lose (Lessa 2013). The search for understanding makes memory permanent, because trying to understand and forget the traumatic past makes it even more present (Robben 2005b). What is remembered is complemented with what is forgotten, and in this sense, forgetting something is more than not remembering it, because it is also remembering something else (Theidon 2003). In sum, to study memory one should study what is forgotten and what is remembered (Erll 2011). Closely related to forgetting, silence acts as contrary (or a complement) to memory, interacting dynamically with it (Jelin 2003b; Bilbija and Payne 2011).

In the Mexican context, what is silenced and forgotten is particularly important; in many instances, different Mexican governments have opted for a strategy of silence that provokes oblivion. By contrast, the relatives of the disappeared have made counter discourses public. More than a battle between forgetting -or silence- and memory, Jelin suggests that memory should be understood as a struggle between different memories or narratives, carried out by 'memory entrepreneurs,' who have an interpretation of the past related to who they are and with what they want to put in the social sphere (Jelin 2003b). Examples of these battles about different meanings of the past, and of different narratives can be found across Latin America, but there is still a gap in the study of these battles for memory in Mexico (Drinot 2009b; Milton 2014; Theidon 2003; P. Smith 2001; Oglesby 2007; Robben 2005b; Wilde 1999; Stern 2006b, 2010, 2006a).

The relationship of memory with the past, the present, and the future, and the relationship between memory and power are also important in order to understand this complex term, and will guide the analysis of the battles for memory around the disappeared in Mexico. As mentioned above, thinking about the past when reflecting on memory seems straightforward, but memory is also inextricably connected with the present and with the future. Huysen argues that, before, history's endeavour was to let the past remain in the past, but now, the past is part of the present (Huysen 2003). Milton shows that memories of the past permeate and constitute the present. Even though the past itself cannot be changed, the interpretations of it can, which makes the battles over different narratives so intense (Milton 2007). Related to this, the battle over what should be transmitted to younger generations is so aggressive precisely because these younger generations are the link between the past, the present, and the future (Agosín 2011; Kaiser 2005a; Grandin 2000). The importance of the past is, then, its active existence in the present (Kaiser 2005a). The conflicts over different meanings of the past are at once political, social, and cultural, (Agosín 2011), since the past is not the only thing at stake, but also a vision of how the present and the future should be. How and when societies remember is linked with what present and what future they want to have (Jelin 2003b; Lessa 2013; P. Smith 2001; Calveiro 2006). The past is looked at with eyes from the present (Lessa 2013), and then combined and recombined in service of the interests of the present (Theidon 2003; Gómez-Barris 2009). According to Huysen, the novelty is not what the future will be, but what the past will be (cited

in Olick and Robbins 1998). Memory is, then, a recombination of the past with the interests of the present, and in preparation for the future.

If memory is a battle over the past for the construction of the present and the future, the battles for memory are, in the end, battles for power (Robben 2005b). Controlling people's memories would be, following Foucault, controlling their dynamism: how and in what direction they move. Then again, memory is power (cited in Olick and Robbins 1998). As a form of power, memory has political value, and it is possible to use it against other forms of knowledge and action (Bixler 2002; Kaiser 2005a). Memory and power are related in yet another way: which group or groups of power support a given narrative has an effect on which narratives gain public access and end up becoming the official ones (Lessa 2013; Drinot 2009a). Burke refers to memory as '(w)ho wants whom to remember what and why? (And) Who wants whom to forget what and why?' (Kaiser 2005a, 7) Adding the words *want* and *why* puts the emphasis on consciousness, but also on the intentionality and the directionality of memory. Different groups want different accounts of the past to be in the public sphere, so this creates battles between memories. As the interests of groups and the contexts change, so do memories. Considering memory as power and as a fundamental part of how the past is remembered for the construction of the future will support the understanding of the relationship between the relatives and the governments across time.<sup>6</sup>

If memory is power, discourses, battles, silences, narratives, oblivion, forgetting, past, present, and future, studying it seems, as described by Kansteiner, a slippery endeavour (Kansteiner 2002). Nonetheless, a lot has been achieved in terms of understanding what to study in order to apprehend (and comprehend) memories. These may be studied, for example, through struggles about memorials, monuments and museums, through commemorations, through narratives of different groups across time, and through artistic representations. Different memories may be understood, as well, through the study of people related to those memories, and through archives and documentation. For Jelin, much of what I analyse below can be named 'vehicles of memory'. Photographs, books, museums, documents, films and rituals of commemoration are cultural products that link subjectivities to the past and present. In picturing the memories of a traumatic past it is essential to identify and study these cultural products in which different actors try to materialise their version of the past (Jelin 2003b).

Marita Sturken defines these objects not as vehicles but as technologies of memory because 'they embody and generate memory and are thus implicated in the power dynamics of memory's production'. These embodiments are particularly literal when the memory object or technology is a body. In the case studies presented by Sturken these bodies are Vietnam War veterans or AIDS

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<sup>6</sup> There are some positions critical to those that embrace remembrance as a step forward. An example of this is Rieff's 'In Praise of Forgetting', where he presents an interesting perspective vis-à-vis the discussion on memory and history, and particularly around the usefulness of the former. He also questions the role of remembrance and commemorations as a step towards non-repetition, and argues for the importance of forgetting (Rieff 2016),

survivors, but in the cases dealt with in this thesis, the importance of the body will be twofold. On the one hand, we have the presence of the relatives, of their bodies, and on the other hand, the absent bodies of the disappeared that have inspired a great number of representations and that have served as memory catalysers (Sturken 1997).

For this thesis, I have selected two forms of memory vehicles. The first one are dates in which disappearances are put in the public space, and the second one are the memorials erected to the disappeared by different groups in different times. In terms of the former, commemorations are seen as a way to resist the logic of forgetting and amnesty by exercising remembrance (Barahona de Brito, González Enríquez, and Aguilar Fernández 2001). The dates marked on a nation's calendar and what they honour and remember, are the result of a long battle of memories, as well as the arena that reflects the past in the present (Jelin 2002). Analysing these battles and the meanings each group want to attach to a certain date helps in understanding the different memories, and the power of each one of those memories at a certain time (Jelin 2007). Even when since the 1980s relatives of the disappeared have used certain dates to memorialise the disappeared and to raise awareness on this topic and contrary to what has occurred in other countries, the scholarly production on this in Mexico has been scarce. The attention has mainly been focused on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of October massacre that occurred in 1968. The battles over meanings in dispute on the dates analysed in chapter 6 and 7 contribute to the original analysis of the battles for memories in Mexico.

As with the battles over meaning around dates, there is also a large literature on memorialisation, musealisation, and monumentality, particularly in terms of their use in contexts in which what has been labelled cultural trauma has occurred. That is to say, where 'members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways' (Alexander et al. 2004, 1). In such contexts, scholars have focused on two main problems: representation and the use or utility of representation. Since the 1980s, the question of *whether* trauma should be represented has been transformed into the question *how* to represent traumatic pasts (Huysen 2003; Stern 2014). This discussion is important because how trauma or horror is represented is not without consequences, for present interests mediate these representations of the past, guided, as explained above, by their connections with the possible future (Kansteiner 2002). This is clear in Drinot's article on *The Eye that Cries*, which illustrates how a monument built in Lima, Peru, after the end of the political violence in a process of apparent reconciliation, is the subject of disputes over the past that are partly marked by national and international events (Drinot 2009a; Maree 1998; Milton 2014).

Monuments, memorials and commemorations are means of expressing political agendas (Robben 2005b), and also a way to put forward a particular memory (Drinot 2009a). The other main discussion on trauma memorials and museums deals with whether they are really as useful for dealing with the past as their promoters claim. Some authors ask if memorials actually help keep memory alive, or on

the contrary serve towards forgetting the past (Huysen 2003). For Robben, the role of memorials is not the same in different societies (Robben 2005b, 154). However, other authors such as Loveman and Lira state that memorials are in fact key to democratisation processes (Loveman and Lira 2007). Organisations such as the United States Institute of Peace, have debated the role of memorials and the importance of who builds them and what the intentions of doing it are, (Barsalou and Baxter 2007), without coming to a conclusion as to their role in democratisation or peace processes.

The scholarly production on memorials and museums in others countries of Latin America and beyond is vast.<sup>7</sup> This is not the case in Mexico. Some recent works of Robledo analysing memorials related to violence are the exception to this (Robledo Silvestre 2015c, 2014). The analysis of five memorials correspondent to the two periods of disappearances in Mexico presented in Chapter 6 informs the debate about the impacts of intentionality behind memorials, but also about who builds memory sites, and the context of creating them. This analysis will contribute to a regional literature on memorialisation in which the Mexican case is missing.

Four authors' contributions guide the analysis of memorials, dates, and discourses around disappearances more generally in following chapters: Pierre Nora's 'realms of memory', Elizabeth Jelin's 'struggles for memory', Tzvetan Todorov's 'literal' and 'exemplary memory', and Gabriel Gatti's 'activists of meaning'. In his study of France, Nora introduces the term *Lieux de mémoire*, memory realms. For him, the realms of memory exist because society has forgotten to remember, 'because there are no longer real environments of memory' anymore (Nora 1989, 7). These realms are not only physical places, but also people, or dates; they are material, symbolic and functional places that aid memory to be present, and are intentionally built knowing that memory will not exist spontaneously (Ricoeur 2004). The will to remember is fundamental to their existence, and because of it they become places of memory; without the will to remember, places of memory would be places of history (Nora 1989). What it is important to analyse are not the realms of memory themselves, but the administration of the past in the present through those realms. A key aspect of this concept is precisely its relation with the will to remember. As will be shown throughout the thesis, there does not seem to exist a wide social will to remember disappearances in Mexico, but the relatives' actions have pushed for these not to be forgotten, as well as for their constant presence in the public sphere.<sup>8</sup>

When analysing memorials and the processes through which they have been created, thinking about the different types of memory is essential. For this, Todorov's notions of literal and exemplary memory are useful. The former refers to a memory that views events as unique and unrepeatable, and therefore cannot be used for anything else but for that specific event. This kind of memory does not

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<sup>7</sup> Among others, see: Schindel 2014; Aguilar n.d.; Traverso and Azúa 2013; Strejilevich 2010; Otálvaro-hormillosa 2013; Michael J. Lazzara 2002; P. Smith 2001; Schindel 2009) Jelin and Langland's edited book is a seminal work on memory sites in Latin America (Jelin and Langland 2002).

<sup>8</sup> I use the concept social will to remember throughout this thesis following Nora's idea of a will to remember and understanding it as the degree of engagement of the broader population with the politics of memory and with policies towards the disappeared.

lead anywhere. The latter views an event as an example of something else and thus may help to understand and even to overcome other situations. Memory serves as exemplary memory when the specific characteristics of an event are forgotten in order to remember what is transferrable and useful in other circumstances (Oglesby 2007). Understanding that some memorials and the reconstruction of certain events promote a literal rather than an exemplary memory can help in analysing their impacts, as shown in chapters 6 and 7.

In the Latin American context, Elizabeth Jelin's contributions to the understanding of memory are crucial. She affirms that there is not one single memory of an event, as different groups will have different interpretations of the facts. These different interpretations give place to a struggle over narratives, a battle not against oblivion, but between different memories that starts as the events are developing, and different versions of it appear in the public arena (Jelin 2007, 2003b). Jelin emphasises the active role of individuals in memory construction, and consequently in transforming the social world; 'thus, to assert that memory involves 'labor' is to incorporate it into the activity that generates and transforms the social world' (Jelin 2003b, 5). For thinking of memory as labour, determining subjects' agency is essential. The identification of memory entrepreneurs becomes necessary to understand these struggles for memory (Jelin 2007, 2003b). For this, it is also important to identify when and how remembrance happens, and which vehicles of memory are put in place. There will be a particular focus in this thesis on the disputes over the meanings of the past, recognising who the agents of memory are and through which vehicles they try to make hegemonic their representation of the past (Jelin 2003b).

Besides being memory entrepreneurs, the relatives of the disappeared can be conceived as what Gatti calls 'activists of meaning'. As the author explains (and I analyse in more detail in chapter 2), disappearances are a situation in which meanings are broken; they rupture the union between a name and a body, and tear the subjects' connection to their community and social relations (Gatti 2014, 33). The policies of memory, some of which are analysed throughout this thesis, are motivated - Gatti argues - by the resolution of filling that gap with meaning. To illustrate the idea of activists of meaning, the author uses the example of archaeologists and archivists in Argentina working to reconstruct meanings after disappearances. As I show mainly in chapter 4, relatives of the disappeared of both periods, and especially those of the second period, have also undertaken actions to provide their loved ones' absence with meaning. The relatives can be understood, then, as memory entrepreneurs fighting to make their version of the events the one that prevails in the public space, and at the same time, as activists of meaning searching for the disappeared, creating legal figures to define them, and working on the rehumanisation of those who are physically absent.

Other terms that have been used in the analysis of memory in Latin America and elsewhere, e.g. Marianne Hirsch's 'postmemory' and Alison Landsberg's 'prosthetic memories' are not used in this thesis (Hirsch 2001, 2008; Alison Landsberg 2004; Kaiser 2005a; Traverso and Wilson 2016; Maguire 2017). As I discuss below, memory transmission does not seem to have been as effective in Mexico

regarding political violence and disappearances as it has in other countries of Latin America and beyond. The case of the Tlatelolco massacre and the memorialisation around it are an exemption to this. In terms of the two periods of disappearances, besides family and small social and activists' circles, memories around the disappeared do not appear to have been adopted by wider sectors of society for long periods. Therefore, these concepts that are based on the presumption of memory transmission and on the mark left by memory in younger generations are not useful for analysing memories of the disappeared in Mexico.

To understand the contributions of this thesis, below I consider the state of the art in the literature on memory and disappearances in Mexico. As I have stated before, the literature on memory focusing in Mexico is scarce, with the exemption of the events of 1968, which appear to hold a privileged place in terms of memory scholarship, and some accounts on memory and political violence during the 1970s. Authors have debated how the student movement and especially the 2<sup>nd</sup> of October Massacre have been represented. An example of this is Bixler's article on the representations of the Massacre, where she shows how theatre representations and discourses of that event have changed over time, and how the reception of the audience has also changed. Other examples are Young's article on the reactions to the Tlatelolco events in Mexican literature, and Del Castillo's work on the uses of photography for the creation of a discourse around the Mexican 1968. On the collective memories of the Mexican 1968, Allier's recent work is enlightening; in this article she analyses the memories of 1968 that have inhabited the public sphere in Mexico City, passing from a 'memory of denunciation' of the repression to a 'memory of praise' of the student movement. Huffschnid refers to the Square of the Three Cultures (Plaza de las Tres Culturas) as one of the most significant sites in Mexico City by its importance in different historical moments (e. g. the Conquest and the 1985 earthquake), but particularly in the 1968 Massacre. The memorial built on the site of the massacre and its receptions have also been analysed (Cornils and Waters 2010; Bixler 2002; Young 1985; del Castillo Troncoso 2010; Allier Montaño 2009; Huffschnid 2012; Ruisánchez Serra 2011; Allier Montaño 2012).

A number of undergraduate and postgraduate theses have used the memory studies framework to analyse Mexican history and the memories of the political violence of the 1970s. In a general vision of the 'Dirty War', Hernández explores how the memories of that period are reconstructed in the early 2000s, how some stories are remembered and others forgotten, and how these respond to particular power battles between different groups. Cruz's thesis on the memory sites and the Madera Barracks Attack is an example of how one event of rebellion and its repression are reinterpreted over time. García's thesis on the memory of authoritarianism presents a small group of memory policies implemented by the Mexican government and the relationship between these policies and the party alternation in the federal government. An article by Brendese explores the memories of political violence in the 1970s, and their remembering in the context of the transitional justice measures that took place in the 2000s (Hernández Ramírez 2006; Cruz Cruz 2013; García Santibáñez Covián 2013;

Brendese 2009). Even though disappearances are part of the context in these studies, they are not the main focus.

As mentioned before, other countries in Latin America –Argentina, Brazil, Guatemala, El Salvador, Peru, and Uruguay, for example- have been the object of different amounts of scholarly production on memory (Drinot 2009a; Milton 2014; Theidon 2003, 2003; P. Smith 2001; Oglesby 2007; Hale 1997; Hanlon and Shankar 2000; Wilde 1999; Stern 2006b, 2006a, Robben 2005b, 2005a; Immler et al. 2012). The fact that edited books on memory in the region do not include Mexico as a case study, or include only the analysis of the memories of the Tlatelolco massacre of 1968 confirms the relevance of a study on the battles for memory of political violence in Mexico that is not limited to the Tlatelolco Massacre (Bilbija and Payne 2011; Jelin and Langland 2002; Jelin 2002; Allier Montaño and Crenzel 2015).

On enforced disappearances in Mexico in general, and particularly in memory studies, the scholarship is limited. Sylvia Karl's recent work on the relatives of the disappeared of the 1970s in the Mexican state of Guerrero is a valuable but rare account on the impact of the ineffective Transitional Justice measures taken by the Mexican government on that group, and on the role taken by the relatives in terms of bringing the memories of the disappeared to the present. López Ovalle's thesis on the representations of the disappeared in Mexico also contributes to this scholarship, focusing on the visual representations that the relatives of the disappeared have used in their struggles over time (López Ovalle 2013). Robledo's work on the responses to disappearances is also relevant (Robledo Silvestre 2015c, 2015a, 2015b).

The relatives of the disappeared have been the subject of studies in other countries of the region (Fried Amilivia 2016; M. J. Lazzara 2013; Catela 2001; Bucheli et al. 2005; Druliolle 2013; Calandra 2004; Morales 2011; Arditti 1999; Restrepo Marín 2015; Gatti 2012; H. Vidal 1982; Teubal, Veiga, and Bettanin 205AD; Gallo Cabrera 2012). In the case of Mexico, some films and books present the stories of the relatives of the disappeared in both periods. On the first period, some film productions analyse the stories of the relatives, particularly of the Eureka Committee and its leader, Rosario Ibarra de Piedra, and also serve as a window to explore the stories of some of the relatives of the disappeared during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s (Serna 2007; Erenberg 2013). On the relatives of the 2000s, new books, theatre plays, and documentaries appear regularly (Turati 2011; Turati and Rea 2012; Gallagher 2013; Rea 2015; Huezco 2015; Robles 2014; Calderón 2014; Vilchis 2016; Mónaco Felipe 2015; Gibler 2013; Marchando con Letras 2015; Rea Gómez 2017). The books 'Fuego cruzado,' 'Entre las cenizas', and 'Nadie Les Pidió Perdón' narrate the stories of some relatives of the disappeared and killed in the context of the 'War on Drugs' in a journalistic manner. Nevertheless, besides Maier's book on the Eureka Committee published in the early 2000s, the production on the organisations of relatives of the disappeared and their role in memory struggles in Mexico is scant (Maier 2001).



In this context, Mexico as a case study can expand on what has been previously done regarding memory studies in Latin America. Other Latin American countries that have been analysed with this framework (e.g. Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Uruguay) lived military dictatorships or internal wars with more defined beginning and ending points. In the majority of the cases, there have been more or less successful transitional justice processes, and many of the memorials and dates of memorialisation have been endorsed by the state. In this panorama, Mexico offers a different context. In the first period of disappearances there was not a clear start or end to political violence as the country did not have a war nor lived under a military dictatorship. The transition that took place in 2000 was only a change in the party in power and not a deep structural change, and the transitional justice measures created in that context have not been effective. All of this has impacted in the discourses and the actions of the relatives of the disappeared.

Besides this, the Mexican case presents two periods of disappearances, which offer an opportunity for the comparison of two forms of disappearances with different contexts, aims, and agents. This context also offers the opportunity of comparing two periods of resistance, seeing how the organisations formed in each of them work, and how they interact with each other. Mexico is not the only country in which disappearances have occurred in different periods. Disappearances happen every day across Latin America, and in countries where disappearances took place before. Nonetheless, the scale of disappearances in Mexico, as well as the rapidly increasing level of organisation and mobilisation of the relatives of the disappeared in Mexico cannot be found in other places of contemporary Latin America.

When selecting the case to study, other cases were taken into consideration. The disappearances in Central America or those of Central American citizens in Mexico, as well as the relationship between disappearances of past decades and contemporary disappearances in countries like Argentina, Brazil and Peru were contemplated. Besides all the reasons stated above, the already existent knowledge of the country and the advantages that this implies for carrying out fieldwork in zones of violence, which I discuss in the methodological section, helped to define Mexico as the case to be selected. The decision of focusing on Mexico responded also to the necessity of an in-depth understanding of a contemporary problem, which a comparative study would not have allowed. Following Bennett and Elman, I argue that having a deep knowledge of one case can inform further researchers understanding other phenomena (Bennett and Elman 2006). Additionally, the decision of focusing on the organisations of relatives of the disappeared and human rights organisations working against disappearances derived from the gap in the literature on Mexico in this regard. This extensive analysis of their history, work, and interactions will serve as a basis for future studies on disappearances in Mexico. The thesis has integrated the international context in which these interactions took place, although this is not the main focus of the analysis. Guided by the research questions presented below, this thesis will contribute to the 'field of the detained-disappeared' (Gatti 2014, 8).

### 1.3 Research Questions

This thesis wants to contribute to the scholarly discussion on memory studies by responding to the following main question and sub questions.

*MQ: What are the continuities and ruptures in the battles of memory around the disappeared between the two periods of disappearances in Mexico?*

There have been two periods of disappearances in Mexico, to which relatives of the disappeared and human rights organisations have responded with different actions. The battles for memory that have been largely studied in other countries of Latin America have received little attention in the Mexican context.

*SQ1: Which groups have acted as memory entrepreneurs and how have different groups interacted with each other?*

To be able to understand the battles for memory, as defined by Jelin, it is necessary to identify those actors who put forward their interpretation of the past (Jelin 2003b). Memory entrepreneurs are those 'who link in their actions the past (to render homage to the victims) and the future (to transmit messages to the 'new generations')'. These actors have an interpretation of the past which relates to who they are and to the version of the event they want to install in the public space (Jelin and Langland 2002, 4; Jelin 2007, 2003a). As in other countries of Latin America, the relatives of the disappeared have been the main memory entrepreneurs. This thesis analyses how they have related to different governments and also how have the organisations of relatives of the disappeared of both periods interacted among them.

*SQ2: What realms of memory have been created in Mexico in regard to disappearances? What processes and battles have there been around their creation? How have the different contexts impacted on the creation of memory realms around the disappeared?*

As Nora explains, memory realms are created when memory does not exist spontaneously (Nora 1989; Nora and Cuesta 1998; Nora 2008). In Mexico, where there has not been a wide and lasting social will to remember the disappearances of the two periods, memory realms have been used to create and guard these memories. It is important to distinguish what kinds of memories are created with these realms and what social consequences they have. The identification of exemplary and literal memories, as well as the identification of dominant and dominated memories helps in the understanding of the impacts they have (Todorov 1996, 2000). The particular contexts in which

memory realms are created as well as the processes for this are key to understanding them and are analysed in this work.

*SQ3: What narratives have been disputed in the memory realms and how has this changed with time?*

For Jelin, battles of memory are at the end battles over different narratives of the events (Jelin 2003b). Gatti speaks of the creation of meanings to counter the loss of meaning brought up by disappearances (Gatti 2014). Analysing the different disputed narratives allows us to understand what is at stake with these battles for memory. Besides the meanings put in place by memory entrepreneurs, it is important to respond to the question of what meanings are produced by these memory realms. As Karl argues, the actions and narratives of the relatives of the disappeared aim for the rehumanisation of the disappeared in response to the dehumanising narratives and practices put in place by state actors (Karl 2014a, 2014b).

## **1.4 Methodology**

### Critical Ethnography and Psychosocial Approach

This thesis draws upon three methodological perspectives. On the one hand, the fieldwork was carried out following a critical ethnography perspective with a psychosocial approach, which takes into account both the psychological impacts of violence at the individual level, and the impacts at the societal level. On the other hand, as I am analysing two periods in Mexico and seven organisations across those periods, I draw upon comparative politics and comparative historical analysis to examine, with a theoretical framework of memory studies, the different battles of memory around the disappeared in Mexico. In terms of the ethnographic method undertaken during fieldwork, as described by Thomas, critical ethnography is an ethnography in which the question is not only how things are, but also how things could be (Thomas 1993, 4). This is an ethnography guided by an ethical responsibility which implies 'a compelling sense of duty and commitment based on principles of human freedom and well-being and, hence, a compassion for the suffering of living beings' (Madison 2011, 5). Besides this, critical ethnography aims at speaking on behalf of the subjects and not for the subjects of analysis, making accessible those voices that would not be easily accessible otherwise (Thomas 1993; Madison 2011). This approach emphasises the importance of the subjects' voice and their own power of transformation (Thomas 1993).

This thesis, therefore, relies heavily on the interviewees' testimonies, as well as on the voices of the relatives of the disappeared expressed elsewhere. To understand the battles for memory around the disappeared in Mexico, the thesis focuses on the organisations of relatives of the disappeared and human rights organisations working against disappearances. The rationale behind this is that a

fundamental part of how disappearances are resisted, how memories are created and official memories are contested is through the social organising and through the creation of collectives. This resistance can hardly be understood without taking into account its collective dimension. It can be argued that those organising to fight against disappearances are the best placed subjects to speak about these issues. As such, the persons interviewed for this thesis are members of collectives working against disappearances in Mexico.

By focusing on the relationship between human rights organisations and collectives of relatives of the disappeared and state agents, other actors - such as the Church, the media and local communities - were not taken into account in such a great detail. The decision was made thinking precisely about the centrality of the relatives of the disappeared and the human rights organisations in terms of the battles for memory around the disappeared, and particularly on how they have not been paid the same attention as in other countries, thus creating a gap in terms of what we know of their role in these battles. In the first moments of this thesis I also wanted to analyse the role of the media as a main actor in these struggles for memory, but this had to be considered a point for future research due to the limitations of this work.

There are currently over 50 organisations working against enforced disappearances in Mexico. When preparing the project for this thesis (2013), there were around 20 organisations working against disappearances.<sup>9</sup> When I chose my case studies (2015) this number had increased to around 30. This change reflects the increase in both the figures of disappearances and the awareness on their implications as a crime and a human right violation. This thesis analyses seven organisations in depth selected according to five factors. Firstly, the relationship with other groups: if the organisations do or do not have ties with other 'supporting' organisations or entities -e.g. other human rights organisations, religious entities, etc.-, and how are they placed alongside other organisations of relatives of the disappeared). Secondly, the actions taken against disappearances: whether their actions are more symbolic, focused on public policy or 'on the ground' (carrying out searches and identification tasks). Thirdly, their membership: if they are a group of relatives of the disappeared only or if they have members who do not have kin relationships with a disappeared person. Fourthly, the scope of their work: if they work with national or local cases. And finally, the relationship with the government: if this is confrontational, cooperative or a mixture of both. Below I analyse the five factors and where the organisations are situated in relation to each of them.

When selecting the cases for this thesis I also took into account where the organisations were based. As this decision was made in the context of the big mobilisations following the enforced disappearance of 43 students in Guerrero, knowing that this state has been the focus of several

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<sup>9</sup> Amongst the universe of victims in Mexico, the relatives of the disappeared are the most organised groups across the country. There are organisations of relatives of other victims, like those of massacres (i.e. Las Abejas), or of governmental negligence and corruption (ABC Nursery), or victims of femicide (Nuestras hijas de regreso a casa), but no other human rights violation has elicited the creation of the same amount of organisations as disappearances has.

studies on disappearances and social struggles, and foreseeing that there would be a big rise in academic interest on disappearances in that state, I decided to focus on other states that have not been analysed in such depth but where disappearances and collectives of relatives also exist and have existed for decades, i.e., the northern states of Chihuahua, Coahuila and Nuevo León. Due to the limitations of this thesis in terms of time and resources, other states such as Jalisco, Michoacán and Veracruz that have also been less studied than Guerrero had to be left out. As discussed above, it is important to understand that the panorama of organisations of relatives of the disappeared has greatly changed in a short period of time, so the visibility of the organisations of other states like Sonora and Veracruz was not as big as it is now.

In terms of the organisations of the first period, the three cases selected are the Eureka Committee (Comité Eureka), the Committee of Mothers with Disappeared Children of Chihuahua (Comité de Madres con Hijos Desaparecidos de Chihuahua) and H.I.J.O.S. The three organisations were and are connected to several social and political organisations, but do not have the accompaniment from human rights organisations that some groups of the second period have.<sup>10</sup> The three organisations work to raise awareness on the disappearances, but whilst Eureka and the Committee of Mothers with Disappeared Children of Chihuahua dedicated much of their energies to put pressure on the government to release the disappeared, H.I.J.O.S. works for social condemnation and social justice. Eureka and the Committee of Mothers with Disappeared Children of Chihuahua represent a national and a local example of a confrontational position towards the state, while still being in dialogue with it. H.I.J.O.S., on the other hand, does not consider the state as its interlocutor but works with cases a national level. In terms of their membership, Eureka is formed mainly by relatives of the disappeared, the Chihuahua Committee is formed by relatives of the disappeared and people in solidarity with them, and H.I.J.O.S. is formed by children of people who has suffered different kinds of repression, and by others who do not have this kin relationship.

For the second period, four organisations were selected: *Ciudadanos en Apoyo a los Derechos Humanos A.C.* (CADHAC - Citizens in Support of Human Rights), *Centro de Derechos Humanos de las Mujeres* (CEDEHM - Centre for Women's Human Rights), *Fuerzas Unidas por Nuestros Desaparecidos en Coahuila-México* (FUUNDEC-FUNDEM - United Forces for Our Disappeared in Coahuila-Mexico), and *Fuerzas Unidas por Nuestros Desaparecidos en Nuevo León* (FUNDENL - United Forces for Our Disappeared in Nuevo León). All of them work to raise awareness of disappearances and to call on the different agencies and levels of the state to comply with its obligations in terms of the prevention, investigation, and sanctioning of disappearances. Their range of actions is broad, but in many cases the organisations also take up what should be state responsibilities, i.e. investigation and identification tasks. This is particularly the case of FUNDENL,

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<sup>10</sup> The term accompaniment, a translation from the Spanish *acompañamiento*, implies the work that individuals or human rights organisations carry out with victims of human rights violations, in which a peer relationship is privileged and in which the organisations offer comprehensive and respectful treatment. It usually implies a horizontal rather than a vertical relationship with the victims, and a vision in which human rights organisations accompany rather than lead the processes. For examples of its use in English see: (PBI United Kingdom n.d.; Alliance for Global Justice 2011; Mahony and Eguren 1997).

which has taken up responsibilities regarding investigation, search, and identification of disappeared persons.

Regarding the relationships with other organisations, the four organisations have particular arrangements in terms of their conformation and basic relationships. CEDEHM in Chihuahua is an established human rights organisation, which accompanies a group of relatives of disappeared persons that are not conformed as an independent group. AMORES is a group of relatives that is closely accompanied by a human rights organisation –CADHAC- in Nuevo León. FUUNDEC-M is a local and national collective, which works with three human rights organisations in different parts of the country. Lastly, FUNDENL is a group of relatives of disappeared persons and people in solidarity who do not work permanently with a human rights organisation. These differences influence their actions and their way of relating to the government.

Although the four organisations selected from the second period dialogue with the government, they all have different approaches. In Nuevo León, while AMORES, accompanied by CADHAC, has a more cooperative relationship with the local government, FUNDENL has a critical and confrontational approach. FUUNDEC-M is critical of the government, but has worked alongside it for the development of different strategies against disappearances at the local level. At the moment of selecting the cases (2015), the governor of Chihuahua did not even acknowledge disappearances, so CEDEHM's relationship to the state was mainly confrontational. As I explain in Chapter 4, this has changed since October 2016 when there was a change in the state government.

In terms of their membership, AMORES, FUUNDEC-FUNDENL and the group accompanied by CEDEHM are formed by relatives of the disappeared only, whilst FUNDENL is a combination of relatives and people working in solidarity without a kin relationship to a disappeared person. Of the four organisations, only FUUNDEC-FUNDEM works with cases at the national level, whilst the others work with cases at the local level. Table 1 (below) summarises the different cases.

Besides these organisations I considered Justice for Our Daughters (Justicia para Nuestras Hijas) as a study case as this would have allowed me to relate the analysis with the topic of women disappearances since the 1990s in Chihuahua. Unfortunately, I was only able to interview one member of staff and one mother looking for her disappeared daughter so this case has not been included as such. The mother's insights and her words have nonetheless been taken into account for this work.

	<b>Relationship with Government</b>	<b>Actions</b>	<b>Membership</b>	<b>Scope</b>	<b>Main connections</b>
<b>AMORES</b>	Cooperation/ Dialogue	Symbolic Public policy	Relatives of the disappeared	Local	Human rights organisations
Relatives accompanied by <b>CEDEHM</b>	Confrontation/ Dialogue	Symbolic Public policy	Human rights organisations	Local	Human rights organisation
<b>Committee of Mothers with Disappeared Children of Chihuahua</b>	Confrontation/ Dialogue	Symbolic Public policy	Relatives of the disappeared accompanied by people in solidarity	Local	Local social and political organisations
<b>Eureka Committee</b>	Confrontation/ Dialogue	Symbolic Public policy	Relatives of the disappeared	National	National and international social and political organisations
<b>FUNDENL</b>	Confrontation/ Dialogue	Symbolic Public policy On the ground	Relatives of the disappeared accompanied by people in solidarity	Local	Human Rights organisations. Local, national and international organisations.
<b>FUUNDEC-FUNDEM</b>	Confrontation/ Dialogue	Symbolic Public policy On the ground	Relatives of the disappeared	National	Human Rights organisations. Local, national and international organisations.
<b>H.I.J.O.S. México</b>	No Dialogue	Symbolic	Children people who has suffered different kinds of repression, and others who do not have this kin relationship	National	Local, national and international organisations.

Table 1 Case Selection (Created by author)

I conducted 33 semi-structured interviews with a total of 34 interviewees in six cities (Chihuahua, Chihuahua; León, Guanajuato; Mexico City; Monterrey, Nuevo León; Saltillo, Coahuila; and Torreón, Coahuila) from March to May 2015. Those interviewed were part of the aforementioned organisations. Once I had selected the organisations to be examined, I contacted them to formally invite them to participate in the study. I interviewed people with different experiences in the organisations, some of them having been involved with the organisations in question since their start and others having joined them more recently. For the human rights organisations, I interviewed people in different areas, mainly those in charge of working with the relatives of the disappeared, but also people in charge of communications, and of general support. I followed the lead of people in the organisations about whom to talk to in order to gather the information I needed. I have been an active member of H.I.J.O.S. since 2008, which meant that I already had contacts with people in the organisations and had previously worked with many of them. In the cases of the organisations of the 1970s, I had direct contact with all the interviewees. My previous work with them meant that the interviewees already knew and trusted me.

In the cases of the organisations of relatives and human rights organisations from the 2000s onwards the approach was different. For CADHAC-AMORES, FUNDEC-M, and CEDEHM, I contacted the human rights centres, which in the majority of the cases organised the interviews for me. In only a few cases, they facilitated the contacts for me to organise the interviews directly. In the case of FUNDENL, the person who in practice works as coordinator helped me arrange the interviews with other members of the collective. As with the cases of the 1970s onwards, it is likely that my membership of H.I.J.O.S. and my previous work with people from the organisations helped when it came to accepting my proposal to work with them. Likewise, the fact that members of the organisations aided in contacting the relatives and organising the interviews meant that interviewees were more likely to trust me.

The majority of the interviews were conducted at the human rights centres or in locations facilitated by the human rights organisations in order to provide safe spaces for the interviewees. In the case of some of the interviewees with whom I was more acquainted, the interviews were conducted in their homes, and one interview was conducted via Skype. All the interviews were recorded and then transcribed; both the audios and word documents have been password protected and safely stored.<sup>11</sup> The UCL Ethics Committee approved the fieldwork plan in October 2014.

All the interviewees received an information sheet and then signed a consent form in which they declared their willingness to participate in this research. At the moment of signing the consent form, two of the interviewees decided to remain anonymous. In this particular matter, the importance of highlighting the stories and the names of the interviewees, as well as the names and pictures of the

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<sup>11</sup> I have saved a copy of the files in an external unit, and another one has been stored in a safe place at the Institute of the Americas.



disappeared helped me reach my decision of including the names of the other interviewees and a table with their information (Appendix 3) and, in the case of the relatives of the disappeared, also including pictures of their disappeared loved ones. The two interviewees who had asked me to remain anonymous were contacted through the organisation working with them to let them know about the appendix containing the names and pictures of the disappeared, after which both decided to withdraw the request of remaining anonymous. As will be argued throughout the thesis, an important task of the relatives of the disappeared and of the organisations working with them is to make the stories of the disappeared visible.

The interviews focused on the collective work in the fight against disappearances, the relationship between the two periods of disappearances, the ways of memorialising the disappeared, and the relationship with the government. Being aware of how traumatic it can be to relive the story of a loved one's disappearance, I chose not to ask about the individual cases in each interview and to focus on the previously mentioned topics, which are the centre of this thesis. I included questions on the personal story of the disappeared relative in the last interviews following feedback from one of the previous interviewees. This made me reflect on my role as a researcher and the ways in which I might think about the subjects' feelings in ways that are not always accurate. During the interviews I exercised an active listening, which implied not only listening to the words of the interviewees, but also paying attention to the ideas and feelings behind the words. One of the challenges during the interviews was to create a safe space for the interviewees.

Besides undertaking interviews, I participated in some other activities during the fieldwork and I obtained access to the personal archives of Sara Hernández de Ramírez Duarte containing Eureka's documents, and Alicia de los Ríos' archive of the Comité de Madres de Chihuahua. I spent around one week in each one of the cities I visited. In Monterrey, I joined FUNDENL for a talk on human rights and disappearances at the Autonomous University of Nuevo León. I also attended a mass in honour of the disappeared at Monterrey's cathedral. In Chihuahua, I joined members of CEDEHM to a service for a young couple that had been disappeared for four years and whose remains had been found incidentally near the Command, Computation, Communication and Control Centre (Centro Comando, Computación, Comunicación y Control, C4) part of the General Prosecutor's Office of Chihuahua (Mayorga 2015b). I analyse the impact of this finding on my interviewees in Chapter 2. In Saltillo, I joined members of FUNDENL for one of their weekly meetings. Besides this, I participated in the events to commemorate Mother's Day on 10 May 2015 and attended the monthly actions to demand the return alive of the 43 Ayotzinapa students in March and April 2015 in Mexico City. All of these activities, along with those I took part in over the years before my fieldwork inform my analysis. It is relevant to mention the importance of having been invited to the events, particularly to the mass in Monterrey and to the funeral in Chihuahua, as this implies a relationship of trust and respect with the relatives and with the human rights organisations, which is essential when working with those who have suffered human rights violations.

The psychosocial approach to the accompaniment of victims guided my interactions with relatives of the disappeared and with members of human rights organisations during fieldwork. This approach recognises the impacts socio-political violence causes on the emotional, family, and communitarian lives of the victims and of society in general. It also acknowledges the way in which political violence affects the social fabric, and, through close work with those affected, tries to accompany processes to reconstruct that fabric. Following international treaties and conventions, the relatives of the disappeared were also considered victims in the sense that their rights are being violated, but more importantly they were considered survivors from whom to learn about the processes they have been protagonists of (Beristain 2012).

With regards to the content of the interviews, my attitude during interviews, and my general attitude during other events, I tried to prevent the revictimisation of those interviewed by treating them with dignity and respect. The exercise of an active listening also implied the acknowledgement of the interviewees' situation, of the particularities of the impacts of these crimes, and of their feelings. The use of an adequate language such as the use of particular terms and adequate verb tenses, as well as showing with verbal and non-verbal language the importance of the testimonies, helped to create those safe spaces and a relationship of trust.

Understanding the needs of each interviewee was also important, and each interview required different tools. Some interviewees were cautious not to share specific information in terms of the place of disappearance of their loved one, or names of government officials out of fear. In one interview, a mother whose son had been disappeared a few months before the interview expanded on what she knew about the disappearance itself and the things she had done since to search for his son. In these cases, it was important not to force the interviews to follow a rigid set of questions, and instead listen to what the interviewees had to say in their own terms. In another occasion, the interviewee, a mother whose son had been disappeared two years before, broke into tears as her son's birthday was approaching and she was torn on how to mark that day.<sup>12</sup> I acknowledged her feelings and, as part of the psychosocial approach we also spoke of how this was a normal reaction to an abnormal situation (Beristain 2012). As a researcher, it was important in these moments to be calm, but also to show empathy and comprehension of the situation. As Beristain suggests, in those moments it is important to offer the interviewees with 'water, a tissue, and respect for their suffering' (Beristain 2012, 112).

In another situation, a woman whose brother and son are disappeared arrived hours after the agreed time for the interview as she was at the hospital looking after her own mother. There, it was important not only to express my understanding of why she was late, but also to recognise the effort she was doing in acceding to do the interview in those conditions. I left space at the end of the interviews for the interviewees to express final thoughts or feelings. Similar considerations were made with interviewees who are not relatives of the disappeared. In many cases, those working in collectives or human rights organisations are also confronted to very emotional circumstances, to attacks and

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<sup>12</sup> See more on the impact of significant dates in chapters 2 and 6.

threats, and to high levels of stress. In this sense, acknowledging these circumstances and providing safe spaces to all the interviewees was essential.

Finally, in terms of my personal safety, acknowledging the context where the fieldwork was carried out, the constant communication with organisations on site, as well as a general safety protocol were essential for carrying out fieldwork. I had not previously been to many of the cities I travelled to, but I had contact with people at the organisations who would provide essential information on safer routes to travel to the cities, where to stay, and how to move around whilst carrying out the interviews. In terms of the safety protocol, a member of an organisation in Mexico City had constant information of my whereabouts and the activities I would undertake. I took provisions to avoid going out at night and carrying valuable objects or sensitive material. Besides this, a person of trust travelled to three of the cities with me. I elaborate further on this and other topics in the following section, but it is important to acknowledge these steps as part of the methodology when carrying out fieldwork in a context of violence.

### *Comparative Analysis*

Besides the critical ethnography accompanied by a psychosocial approach, this research draws upon comparative politics and comparative historical analysis to examine the different battles for memory around the disappeared in Mexico. Qualitative studies, particularly comparative politics and comparative historical analyses can examine historical processes relating the past and the present in a way that has been helpful for this thesis in order to make comparisons between the two periods of disappearances and among the seven organisations selected for the analysis (Lim 2010; Mahoney and Rueschemeyer 2003b). As Mahoney and Rueschemeyer point out, the comparative historical analysis includes 'a concern with causal analysis, an emphasis of processes over time, and the use of systematic and contextualized comparison' (Mahoney and Rueschemeyer 2003a, 6). Gerring sees this as an advantage over the quantitative method that does not allow the social scientist to 'look in the box of causality', understanding how some factors act over another, and not just establishing that they do. While quantitative studies are able to determine the amount of influence one factor has over another, qualitative studies manage to accommodate the study of several factors at a time and to understand complex causalities (Gerring 2004; George and Bennett 2005; Bennett and Elman 2006). These comparative frameworks will help in analysing the battles for memory around the disappeared across time in Mexico, as well as the differences and similarities between the different organisations and the way in which they interact with different actors. Moreover, they will allow me to analyse the impact that the work of the first period of disappearances has had on the second period.

## **1.5 Working on Disappearances**

I consider it fundamental to analyse and state my own position as a researcher in this investigation, as this is a fundamental part of doing critical ethnography (Madison 2011; Thomas 1993). I started working on disappearances in Mexico in the early 2000s, when I co-authored a BA thesis on the grief of the children of people who had been disappeared for political reasons in Mexico, focusing on H.I.J.O.S. México (Gómez Lvoff and De Vecchi Gerli 2008). Since 2008, I have been an active member of H.I.J.O.S., an organisation that works against disappearances and for memory, truth, and justice regarding the disappearances in Mexico. As a member of H.I.J.O.S., I have been honoured to get to know women and men who have been fighting for decades for the return alive of their disappeared loved ones. I have shared intense and memorable moments with mothers, sisters, wives, daughters, fathers, brothers, and sons that have made of their life a permanent battle against impunity, oblivion, and injustice. I have shared with them the pain of realising that the struggle against disappearances in Mexico was not only a struggle for memory, truth, and justice anymore but also a struggle against daily disappearances. It was painful to see that hundreds of relatives were joining or creating groups to deal with new disappearances, to ask for justice and to demand the government return their loved ones. Through the work in H.I.J.O.S., I met relatives of the disappeared in the context of the so-called 'War on Drugs'. I got to understand that these stories of disappearances will keep on happening until society acknowledges that disappearances and crimes against humanity are precisely that: crimes committed against one person or group of persons that affect us all, as a society. The questions I ask myself in this thesis and the reflections on the topic are the result of these years working on disappearances but also of working with relatives of the disappeared. Following Gabriela Fried and her work on the cycles of memory in Uruguay, I can say that this is a research project from the heart.<sup>13</sup>

Being a member of H.I.J.O.S. possibly opened a lot of doors for this work that would have been more difficult to access if I lacked previous work with organisations. Many of the relatives of the disappeared and people working within human rights organisations have had unpleasant experiences with students and journalists looking for a testimony, where their testimonies were altered or the work was not shared with them afterwards. Besides that, often interviews are conducted without undertaking necessary previous work on the context and on the impacts of these crimes, and without empathising with the interviewees. In this context, my work with H.I.J.O.S. perhaps made some of the relatives more confident to talk to me. The advantage I had in terms of access to testimonies is a great responsibility for me as well.

Throughout the entire process of this thesis, I had in mind the urgency of the problem and the deep emotional and physical burden that searching for their disappeared implies for the relatives and for those working against disappearances. I have also reflected on the energy they have to invest in

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<sup>13</sup> Fried draws upon Gatti's sociology 'from the gut'. Being a sociologist and a relative of disappeared persons, Gatti affirms that his place of enunciation are his disappeared relatives (Fried Amilivia 2016; Gatti 2014, 1).

participating in interviews and the contribution this thesis can make to their work. Almost all of the relatives with whom I spoke dedicate a great part of their daily lives to search for their disappeared loved ones. They attend trainings, collaborate with human rights organisations, lobby against disappearances and give talks; they search for their disappeared in every possible way and, in the middle of all this, they answer the questions of people like me who are interested in their stories. I acknowledge the effort they put into taking the time to share their views and how hard it is to keep on re-living traumatic experiences, so I am profoundly grateful that they took the time to share their stories with me. Some of the relatives that I interviewed for this thesis and others with whom I spoke informally during my time in different parts of the country confided in me that they are tired of doing things because they do not know how they will have an impact in having their loved ones back with them. Even if this thesis will not directly help them in bringing back the disappeared and preventing disappearances from ever happening again, I do hope that it will contribute to the understanding of this phenomenon. As Thomas asserts, being a critical ethnographer means having in mind that academic research can be used as a tool for social change. In his words, '(c)ritical ethnographers (...) celebrate their normative and political position as a means of invoking social consciousness and societal change' (Thomas 1993, 4).

In terms of the challenges of doing this thesis, I would highlight the complications of writing about such a current and prominent topic, the difficulties of doing this from afar, and the complexities of carrying out fieldwork in a conflictive area and working on a sensitive topic. The complexities of writing about human suffering are also something I have borne in mind. On the first topic, even though studying enforced disappearances and the memories around them is important, the public relevance of this topic has changed greatly in Mexico in the last three years. As I show in Chapter 7, the enforced disappearance of 43 students from the Rural Teaching College of Ayotzinapa gave disappearances a more prominent space in the public sphere. The number of organisations working in every state in the country and the level of exposure they have in the media have increased. Following the events and understanding the context to then focus on the relevant aspects for this thesis has been a constant challenge. Being far away from Mexico has meant that the analysis I can provide is mediated by the information I get access to being in London, and that I can only be a part of the developing academic discussion on the matter in a very restricted way. The pace in which the panorama is changing also means that some of my findings from fieldwork carried out in 2015 have to be carefully analysed and situated in time.

I have frequently reflected on the ethical implications of writing about other people's suffering. Including accounts of torture and of ways of disposing of bodies has been necessary, but I have aimed at using them for the analysis and not in sensationalistic ways. As Madison explains, it is important to think about the impacts that our work can have in the lives of the people we are portraying. The politics of positionality that imply reflecting on my own privileges, power and biases as a researcher have also played an important and constant role in the thesis (Madison 2005). On this, Gatti calls, drawing on Haraway, to also reflect on the 'mutated modest witness' that implies that the

researcher 'recognize their implications, their responsibilities over what they observe, their situation in the field they examine, their position in it'. The researcher should accept that knowledge has consequences for its object of study (Gatti 2014, 4–5).

Working on this thesis has also represented a challenge and a constant reflection on violence and personal security. The risks of working on enforced disappearances have also changed in the years I have been following this issue. In 2006-2008, when I studied the effects of enforced disappearances of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, enforced disappearances were usually perceived as a problem of the past. It was a political topic, a contested arena, but it did not feel like a dangerous endeavour. My involvement with groups working on disappearances has grown since then, so my implication has exceeded the academic arena. But the context has also changed profoundly, as I will show throughout this thesis. The harassment and repression of human rights defenders, the criminalisation of protest, and the overall context of violence and human rights violations have made investigating human rights issues more difficult in general. For carrying out fieldwork I had financial support from University College London. For this, a risk assessment had to be done, along with the approval of the Ethics Committee. Following their instructions, I checked for the travel advice on the Foreign Office Website. Not surprisingly, the places where I was travelling to (mainly Chihuahua, Coahuila, and Nuevo León) were highlighted as particularly problematic and violent places ('Safety and Security - Mexico Travel Advice - GOV.UK' n.d.).<sup>14</sup> To receive clearance from the Ethics Committee I had to describe my previous work on the topic and the knowledge of the region and of the people with whom I was going to be working. The majority of the organisations with which I worked have suffered different levels of harassment, threats, and attacks and have their own security protocols. Many of the relatives interviewed for the thesis have also suffered some level of harassment. The preparation that I had to undertake before leaving helped me reflect on the conditions of violence and vulnerability people have to endure. Being afar then served as an advantage to question things that can become normalised while being in the country.

Finally, it is important to reflect on the difficulty of working with human rights violations. While doing this research I have felt the suffering and the pain of the relatives, as well as the impunity and the corruption of the government that have resulted in the revictimisation of those affected. I have felt the despair of the mothers that need to know if their children are alive or not, I have felt the exhaustion of the people who work in the organisations. As Beristain affirms, those who work on these issues carry part of the victims' suffering (Beristain 2012, 119). Nonetheless, during my fieldwork and reading about the stories of the disappeared and the struggles of their families and loved ones, I have also felt the love, care, and strength of those who are willing to give it all to find their disappeared, but also to find all the disappeared; to stop violence and impunity. Acknowledging and dealing with the emotional impact of this work has been a deeply challenging process. During these years, I have also

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<sup>14</sup> The travel advice was cautious on visiting Mexico in 2015 when I carried out fieldwork, which was highly different to the image of Mexico as a tourist destination (cabs and buses with beautiful images of Mexico and with the slogan 'Mexico: live it to believe it' were commonly seen in the streets of London during the 'Dual Year of the United Kingdom and Mexico').

participated in different actions to raise awareness of this problem and what can be done from afar through my participation in H.I.J.O.S. México and London Mexico Solidarity. As Keiser suggests, as a researcher it is important to acknowledge the reality one comes from and one's involvement with the problem studied (Kaiser 2005a). My own implication in this problem will play a role, and I have reflected on it and made it as visible and present as possible so I can work with it and not against it.

## 1.6 Thesis Outline

The thesis is divided into two parts. The first part is a contextualisation for the second and has four chapters and the second, more analytical in its approach, has three chapters. The first chapter is the *Introduction*.

**Chapter 2, *Disappearances: Naming the Absence***, is formed of three sections that will allow the reader to understand what disappearances are. In the first section, ***Disappearances in the Dictionary***, I analyse the characteristics of the term disappeared, and its complexity as a category that implies the joint possibility of life and death. I then analyse the specificities of enforced disappearances in international legislation in the section ***Enforced Disappearances According to the Law***. The third section, ***When a Loved One is Disappeared: The Uncertainty of a Present Absence***, examines what disappearances mean to the relatives of the disappeared, particularly in terms of the absolute uncertainty about the destiny and state of the victim and the permanent presence of an absence in daily life. In this section I look at the particularities of the struggle in Mexico, where many of the relatives of the disappeared from past decades still demand the return alive of their loved ones, contrary to what happens in other countries of Latin America (e.g. Argentina, Guatemala).

**Chapter 3, *The Recent History of Enforced Disappearances in Mexico*** provides a historical context to understand the two main periods of enforced disappearances in Mexico. The chapter is divided into three sections; the first section, ***Enforced Disappearances during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s*** presents the context in which the PRIísta regime used enforced disappearances as one of the ways to deal with its political opponents from the late 1960s to the 1980s.<sup>15</sup> It explains the context of social unrest in which guerrillas were formed along with other forms of dissidence, and the way these were repressed. The second section, ***Disappearances from the mid-2000s Onwards***, examines the period from the mid-2000s up until now. I consider the reasons for the increase in violence and the militarisation of the country and its effects, describing the human rights crisis

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<sup>15</sup> The now Partido Revolucionario Institucional (Institutional Revolutionary Party) was founded in 1929 under the name of Partido Nacional Revolucionario (National Revolutionary Party) as a result of the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920). It then changed its name to Partido de la Revolución Mexicana (Party of the Mexican Revolution) in 1938 and finally became the PRI in 1946. It governed Mexico for 71 years (1929-2000), when the PAN (Partido Acción Nacional, National Action Party) came to power. It can now be catalogued as centre-right, but has occupied different parts of the spectrum. For more on PRI's history, see: (Garrido 1982; Hernández Rodríguez 2016).

resulting from President Calderón's 'War on Drugs' and its prevalence in the Peña Nieto administration. I highlight the differences in terms of the disappearances of the two periods in terms of the agents of crime and of the targeted victims. Finally, I deal with impunity and military involvement as two factors of continuity for these crimes throughout the two periods. The third section, ***The Social Will to Remember***, analyses the lack of social accompaniment to the battles for memory, and advances hypothesis for why this has been the case in Mexico.

***Chapter 4, Seven Cases of Organisations Working against Disappearances in Mexico*** presents the case studies of this thesis in two sections. In this chapter I explore the actions and ways of organising of the relatives of the disappeared of both periods, explaining their similarities and differences and thinking about the context in which they work. The first section, ***Brief History of the Organisations*** presents a historical account of each one of the organisations, exploring how and when they were formed, as well as their membership and ways of working. The second section, ***Continuities and Ruptures in the Search for the Disappeared in Mexico*** is divided in three subsections in which the organisations of the two periods are compared according to their relationships with other groups, their actions against disappearances, and their relationship with the government. The differences that the organisations present in these categories are influenced by the different contexts in which they carry out their struggle.

***Chapter 5, The Battles for Memory: Naming the Disappeared in Mexico*** explores the battles for memory around the disappeared from the 1970s, focusing on how different governments and groups of relatives have defined the crimes and what this has implied in terms of public policies and the actions that relatives have carried out. The chapter is divided into three sections. The first section, ***Naming the Absence: the Disappeared for Political Reasons (1960s onwards)***, focuses on responses to disappearances for political reasons. It shows that the relatives of the disappeared insisted on drawing attention to the state's implication in the crimes by using categories that highlighted this and that were being used across the region. I present the creation of two governmental institutions that dealt with the disappeared, showing that the government responded by using different terms to talk about disappearances, denying its responsibility in the crimes. I underline how these institutions did not tackle the problem at its root and failed to solve disappearances. The second section, ***Naming the Absence: The Disappeared and the 'War on Drugs'*** deals with the battles for memory in terms of the categories used to name those disappeared during the so-called 'War on Drugs'. I examine the changes in the discourses around victims in general and on the disappeared in particular, stressing their political connotations and the active role of the relatives of the disappeared. As in the previous period, the categories used by state actors served to minimise its responsibility around disappearances, and the public policies put in place do not serve to change the status quo. I argue that this lack of adequate categories impacts the capacity of having reliable figures on disappeared people, therefore affecting the ability of creating suitable public policies to deal with the problem efficiently. In the third section, ***Rehumanising the Disappeared: Actions against the Blaming the Victim Strategy*** I advance the argument on the strategies used by the government of



blaming the victim, which is related to the idea of the disposableness of the victims (Butler 2016). It is in the context of this fight that the ways of memorialising the disappeared and bringing them back to the public space represent a strategy against the dehumanisation carried out by the state.<sup>16</sup>

**Chapter 6, *The Battles for Memory: Contestation around Dates and Memorials on the Disappeared***, deals with different ways in which disappearances have been memorialised in Mexico over time, focusing on the disputes over memory on dates and memorials as memory sites. Following Nora (Goldhammer 1996; Nora 1989; Nora and Cuesta 1998), who claims that memory sites are built where memory is absent, I analyse dates and memorials that focus on disappearances, and discuss the context in which they were created and the disputes they reflect.<sup>17</sup>

The chapter is divided into three sections. The first one, ***Dates and the Memorialisation of the Disappeared in Mexico*** analyses two dates used to memorialise the disappeared at the local, national, and international level. I also discuss the use of personal dates to dispute the dominant discourse on disappearances. In the second section, ***How to Materialise Absence: Memorials for the Disappeared***, I examine five memorials to disappearances, focusing on their moment of creation, their creators, those who are remembered and their intended audience, emphasising their use and the responses they have elicited. I analyse the connections between the memorialisation of both periods of disappearances, arguing that the mere existence of these memorials and commemorations on specific dates show that there is a contestation in terms of memory around the disappeared. I engage in a reflection on the lack of will to remember in Mexico, analysing its impacts and possible causes. Although the battles for memory might not be as visible as in other countries to which I refer in this thesis, the work of relatives of the disappeared and human rights organisations working with them is a constant reminder of these different memories that want to change the dominant discourse around the disappeared, so as to influence the government's action on disappearances. As I argue in this chapter, different governments have moved from a policy of silence towards disappearances to a more active way of using memorialisation to promote their own agendas.

In **Chapter 7, *Ayotzinapa and its Impact on the Panorama of Disappearances in Mexico***, I examine how the disappearance of 43 students in Iguala, Guerrero in September 2014 changed this panorama by analysing the effect in terms of giving and restricting visibility that the Ayotzinapa case had on the wider issue of disappearances.

The chapter is divided into four sections. In the first section, ***What happened in Iguala?***, I explain the events that took place on 26 and 27 September, when 43 students were disappeared, six persons (among them three Ayotzinapa students) were killed and others were severely wounded. The disappearance of the 43 Ayotzinapa students generated a massive wave of support and

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<sup>16</sup> Karl's work on the way in which the relatives' actions bring back humanity to (re)humanise) the disappeared will be of main importance for this analysis (Karl 2014a).

<sup>17</sup> Works by Jelin et. al. are key in this analysis (Jelin 2002, 2007; Jelin and Langland 2002).

unprecedented coverage in the media. In the second section, ***The Emblematic Ayotzinapa Case***, I examine the factors that made this case especially visible. The third section, ***Battles for Memory over Ayotzinapa***, deals with the battles for memory around Ayotzinapa emphasising their public character and highlighting the contrast with previous cases of disappearances in the country. In the last section, ***Ayotzinapa and its (Dis)connection with the Broader Context of Disappearances***, I explain the relationship that the case has produced regarding the general crisis of disappearances in the country in terms of making it invisible in some ways, but in boosting its visibility in other ways. Even though the case has opened the public debate on disappearances, uncovering a crisis that had been previously concealed, it can be seen as what Todorov calls *literal memory* - treated as a unique case – rather than as *exemplary memory* - a case that explains or represents others- (Todorov 2000). In this last section I analyse the impact that the disappearance of 43 students from the Ayotzinapa school has had on other collectives and organisations of relatives of the disappeared, and on the public policies around disappearance.

Finally, in the ***Conclusions*** I summarise the findings of the thesis. I show how even though disappearances have historically not had a central place in the Mexican public sphere, battles for memory around the disappeared in Mexico have taken place for decades. I show the battles for memory in the form of the categories used to name the disappeared in both periods, and the ways in which relatives of the disappeared, organisations, and different governments have used memorials and dates to portray certain memories of the disappeared and the impacts this has had. Many questions arose in the process of doing this research, so this chapter ends with some suggestions on further studies about memorialisation in Mexico and about disappearances more generally.

## CHAPTER 2 DISAPPEARANCES: NAMING THE ABSENCE

Enforced disappearances started to be committed as a strategy of the national security state in the late 1960s in Latin America in the context of the Cold War. The disappearance of people whose whereabouts were concealed and whose mere kidnapping was denied by all agents resulted in people organising to give meaning to what is defined by Gatti as a catastrophe. This work produced a national and international legal framework to name, prevent, and punish these crimes (Gatti 2014).

The present chapter is divided into three sections. The first section presents how disappearances are defined in a number of dictionaries. The intention is to show the prominence that the Argentinian case has had in terms of defining disappearances, while illustrating how disappearances are commonly defined in terms of, or even treated as a euphemism, for death. In the second part, I analyse how disappearances are defined in international legislation. I describe the creation of this framework and its implications and limitations for disappearances that occurred in Mexico from the mid-2000s onwards. The third section examines the implications of disappearances for the disappeared's loved ones, focusing on the importance of disappearances as a liminal category which does not completely correspond to life or death, as well as the permanent presence of the figure of the disappeared in daily life.

### 2.1 Disappearances in the Dictionary

In trying to unpack the meaning of the word 'disappeared' and of the verb 'disappear' (and then 'to disappear'), dictionary entries in English and Spanish help to highlight common problems that arise when thinking about the disappeared.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines 'disappear' as:

**a. intr.** Of a person: to go missing in suspicious circumstances; **spec. (euphem.)** to undergo abduction or arrest, esp. for political reasons, and subsequently to be detained or killed, without one's fate being made known.

**b. trans. euphem.** To abduct or arrest (a person), esp. for political reasons, and subsequently to kill or detain as a prisoner, without making his or her fate known. Freq. with reference to Latin America. [Originally and chiefly after American Spanish *desaparecido*] ('Disappear, V.' n.d.).

The second definition shows that the use of 'disappear' as transitive verb is associated to the lexicon developed in Latin America after the disappearance of tens of thousands of persons. Feitlowitz affirms: 'The deformation in the Argentinean language –beginning with the unprecedented use of 'disappear' as a transitive verb- changed lives in often subtle ways' (Feitlowitz 1998, xi).

In the same dictionary, the word 'disappeared' is defined as:

A. adj. 2 Of a person: reported missing and presumed dead; **spec. (euphem.)** arrested or abducted (esp. for political reasons) and subsequently secretly imprisoned or killed. (...)

B. n. With **pl.** concord. With **the**. People who have disappeared as a class; **spec. (euphem.)** those who have been arrested or abducted (esp. for political reasons) and then secretly imprisoned or killed. (...) In **spec.** use, freq. with reference to Latin America and prob. originally after Spanish **desaparecido** ('Disappeared, Adj. and N.' n.d.).

The OED defines the word 'desaparecido' -in Spanish- as: 'Any of the many people who disappeared in Argentina during the period of military rule between 1976 and 1983, presumed killed by members of the armed services or of the police. Usu. in *pl.*' ('Desaparecido, N.' n.d.). Similarly, the Merriam-Webster dictionary defines 'desaparecido' as 'an Argentine citizen who has been abducted and usually murdered by right-wing terrorists' ('Definition of DESAPARECIDO' n.d.). These two definitions show the impact that the Argentine experience had on definitions of the concept at the international level, in line with Gatti's analysis on the subject (Gatti 2014, 157).

The political motivation of disappearances and the dichotomy of people illegally detained or killed reflect the definition of disappearances as 'archetypal disappearances', disappearances for political reasons in which the person disappeared was maintained in secret or clandestine prisons, while their whereabouts were unknown, with the likelihood of them being later killed and their bodies disposed of (Gatti 2014). An important aspect missing from this definition is the agent of the disappearances. The definition that does include the agent of the disappearances (Merriam-Webster) defines them as 'right-wing terrorists' ('Definition of DESAPARECIDO' n.d.).

Some definitions characterise disappearances as equal or as euphemisms of death. Like the OED definition of 'disappeared' cited above, the Royal Spanish Academy Dictionary (Diccionario de la Real Academia Española) defines disappeared as: '(...) 1. adj. Of a person: whose whereabouts are unknown, without the knowledge of if they are still alive. (...) 2. adj. eufem. dead (...) ('Desaparecido, Da' n.d.). The political aspect of a disappearance or the agent who committed the crime are absent from the RAE.

Dictionaries include some of the elements present in the legal definition of enforced disappearances, but they also help us in pointing out some of the problems commonly found when thinking about disappearances, namely equating them to death, not mentioning or misrepresenting those responsible of the crime, and portraying them as a crime circumscribed to Latin America, when they are committed throughout the world as the cases of Rwanda, Turkey, Cyprus and Lebanon to name a few show. As I analyse below, all of these issues respond to specific ways in which these categories have been constructed and to the ambiguity and uncertainty inherent to disappearances.

## 2.2 Enforced Disappearances According to the Law

There is a political history of the term enforced disappearance, which is linked with the actions undertaken by relatives of the disappeared and human rights organisations from the moment their loved ones were disappeared. Even though the precedent of disappearances comes from the World War II, relatives of the disappeared and organisations from Latin America were the first to raise the issue at an international level, creating an interest in this crime and pushing for the creation of international, regional, and national legislations to prevent and punish disappearances (Bermejo n.d.; Gatti 2014).

The Colombian Historical Memory National Centre divides the history of international legislation on enforced disappearances into four periods, which respond to the way in which this legislation was created in the international arena, but also to the relationship between the Colombian and regional and international legislation. I draw on this analysis, but adapting its categories to three relevant periods at the international level.<sup>18</sup> In the original text, the periods are divided as follows: 1) 1970-1982, 2) 1983-1994, 3) 1995-2002, and 4) 2003-2012. Nonetheless, as the third period reflects mostly changes in the national legislation that are not relevant here, I have changed the periods to: 1) 1970-1982, 2) 1983-1994, and 3) 1995-2012 (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica 2014b).

In a first period, the ‘prehistory of enforced disappearance’, from 1970 to 1982, the UN General Assembly made comments on disappearances on several occasions. Even though disappearances as a legal category had not been defined, it was already being used by relatives and organisations across the region. The concept allegedly was used in Guatemala since 1966 to describe the tactics used by the government, and it was then widely adopted in Chile, Argentina, and other countries of the region where these crimes were taking place. In the 1981 publication *‘Disappearances’: A Workbook*, Amnesty International explains that ‘

(t)he term ‘disappearance’ was first used (as *desaparecido* in Spanish) to describe a particular government practice applied on a massive scale in Guatemala after 1966. One of the first instances of the ‘disappearance’ strategy occurred in March 1966, when security forces abducted, tortured and murdered 28 members of the Guatemalan Worker’s party. Though confirmations of their demise came from participants in the mass arrest, the victims’ bodies were never discovered (Clark 1995, 147; Schivone 2017).

The Nazi ‘Nacht und Nebel’ (Night and Fog) Decree (1941) is commonly cited as the first predecessor of enforced disappearances as a state practice. This Decree established that those dangerous to the Nazi regime in occupied territories should be transported under night and fog –in clandestinity, to Germany. The whereabouts of the prisoners should be denied. Nonetheless, disappearances

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<sup>18</sup> The Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica (Historical Memory National Centre-Colombia) provides an exhaustive analysis of the history of enforced disappearances as a legal category. In a similar study, Bermejo shows the development of the category enforced disappearance but in the Inter American Court on Human Rights (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica 2014b; Bermejo n.d.).

escaped the eye of international law as a separate crime for decades (Bargu 2014; Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica 2014b; Clark 1995). The first time the term 'disappeared' was used in an international legal document was in reference to Cyprus, when in 1975 the UN General Assembly asked the General Secretary to help to find people disappeared in that country during the armed conflict. In 1977, it referred to Chile and to the disappearance of political opponents, and in 1978, it referred to disappearances worldwide and the importance of countries taking measures against these crimes. In 1982, the UN General Committee on Human Rights addressed state parties asking them to take measures to prevent disappearances that often lead to deprivation of liberty (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica 2014b, 69–72). In English the term went from 'missing person' in the early resolutions on Cyprus and Chile to 'persons who have disappeared', before finally referring to 'disappeared persons' (Rubin 2015).

In 1974, Amnesty International (AI) and the International Commission of Jurists filed a report at the Inter American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) to share their preoccupation on the situation in Chile (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica 2014b, 75). The Organisation of American States referred to the disappearances in the Southern Cone, focusing on illegal detentions in Argentina (1980). In the same way, in 1982 the IACHR recommended states to adopt measures against disappearances (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica 2014b, 12). Both the predominance of the use of enforced disappearances in National Security regimes in Latin America, and the creation of organisations fighting against them explain the legal development of the definitions of these crimes in the region before its global development (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica 2014b).

In a second period from 1983 to 1994, there was great progress in terms of defining enforced disappearances at the regional and global level. In 1989, the Inter American Court on Human Rights (IACoHR) defined it as a transversal violation of several human rights (right to life, right to liberty and security, right to not be subject to torture, etc.), stating that committing it violates the American Convention on Human Rights. In 1992, the UN General Assembly adopted the Declaration on the Protection of all Persons against Enforced disappearances, which served as a starting point for the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance adopted in 2006. The draft version of the Inter American Convention on Forced Disappearance of Persons was used to strengthen the UN Declaration. Several NGOs, among them the Latin American Federation of Associations of Relatives of Disappeared Persons (FEDEFAM) participated in an expert meeting to draft this Declaration. Due to the difficulty of defining this crime, the Declaration lacks a clear definition of enforced disappearances, but the recurring elements of the crime are included in the preamble (OHCHR 1992). In 1994, the Inter American Convention on Forced Disappearance of Persons was signed.

The Inter-American Convention on Forced Disappearance of Persons establishes that:

(F)orced disappearance is considered to be the act of depriving a person or persons of his or their freedom, in whatever way, perpetrated by agents of the state or by persons or groups of persons acting with the authorization, support, or

acquiescence of the state, followed by an absence of information or a refusal to acknowledge that deprivation of freedom or to give information on the whereabouts of that person, thereby impeding his or her recourse to the applicable legal remedies and procedural guarantees ('International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance' n.d.).

Within this Convention, the systematic practice of forced disappearances constitutes a crime against humanity. It establishes that '(t)his offense shall be deemed continuous or permanent as long as the fate or whereabouts of the victim has not been determined' (Organization of American States n.d.). In this Convention, enforced disappearances can be committed by any person but with the authorisation, support or acquiescence of the state. Authors of the crimes have to be tried by civic authorities.

During the third period, 1995-2012, the UN General Assembly adopted the International Convention for the Protection of all Persons against Enforced Disappearances (International Convention from now on). Twelve years after the creation of the Inter American Convention, this Convention established a common base to understand what enforced disappearances mean at the UN level (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica 2014b, 194). Nonetheless, only 42 state parties have signed this Convention, which only entered into force in 2010, when the twentieth country had signed it.

The International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance defines disappearances as:

(T)he arrest, detention, abduction or any other form of deprivation of liberty by agents of the State or by persons or groups of persons acting with the authorization, support or acquiescence of the State, followed by a refusal to acknowledge the deprivation of liberty or by concealment of the fate or whereabouts of the disappeared person, which place such a person outside the protection of the law ('International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance' n.d.).

The International Convention also marks that '(t)he widespread or systematic practice of enforced disappearance constitutes a crime against humanity'. Both the possibilities of death and life are considered within this Convention, which establishes that 'Each State Party shall take all appropriate measures to search for, locate and release disappeared persons and, in the event of death, to locate, respect and return their remains' ('International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance' n.d.).

According to this Convention, disappearances must not be committed even in war, political instability, and states of exception. This part of the document is the result of the lessons from the authoritarian regimes of the 1970s, which argued that the reason to implement disappearances was the threat of an internal enemy that was being attacked in order to protect the national interest. For this Convention, 'any individual who has suffered harm as the direct result of an enforced disappearance', is considered a victim. The convention defines the rights to know the truth about what happened and to get access to the investigation. All victims shall have access to reparation and compensation ('International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance' n.d.). The

inclusion of these provisions responded to the experience with disappearances and their treatment over decades, and to the input given by organisations of relatives of the disappeared and human rights organisations.<sup>19</sup> The definition of these crimes contained in the Inter American and in the International Conventions emphasise the agents who commit the disappearances and the consequences this has for the disappeared person. Disappearances are not equated to death and, contrary to dictionary definitions, there is no reference to the use of disappearances to control political opponents.

Both conventions were created following pressure by organisations of relatives of the disappeared and human rights organisations (Reátegui 2012, 13; Clark 1995). FEDEFAM, which includes two Mexican organisations of relatives of the disappeared, had an important role in both conventions. Local organisations and their contact with international organisations such as AI, the International League for Human Rights, the International Commission of Jurists, among others helped put the necessary pressure at the international bodies for them to create these conventions. The organisations then participated in the discussions for the conventions and for the conceptualisation of the crime, giving input according to their own experiences.

The cases of Chile and Argentina were especially prominent during the early years of the international attention to disappearances.<sup>20</sup> As early as 1973, AI initiated a campaign for disappeared prisoners in Chile. In 1976, the same organisation sent a working group to Argentina after the military coup and in its 1977 report disappearances were catalogued the gravest problem in the country. Likewise, the IACHR closely followed the events in both countries, which had not been the case with human rights violations in Guatemala. The UN Working Group on Enforced and Involuntary Disappearances (UNWGEID) was created in this context. According to Clark, '(t)he resolution that set up the Working Group 'was known informally in the corridors as the "Argentina resolution"', although the political will to do a resolution on Argentina did not exist (Clark 1995, 169). The UNWGEID consulted with NGOs on their mechanisms for dealing with disappearances so they could build from their experience to act on disappearances rather than only condemning them. The International Commission of Jurists had an important role in organising the first draft of the UN Declaration on Disappearances (Clark 1995, 169–70, 180). The lobbying of relatives of the disappeared and human rights organisations marked the international legal framework on enforced disappearances, shaping the crime according to a specific time and context.

It is crucial to understand the conceptual difference between disappearances and enforced disappearance to comprehend the battles for memory around the disappeared and the continuities and ruptures between the two periods of disappearances in Mexico in terms of the actions of the

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<sup>19</sup> The four reports on the elaboration of the Convention with a summary of the discussions can be found at: OHCHR 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006.

<sup>20</sup> Clark describes a workshop organised by AI U.S.A. to develop an international definition of disappearance. Many relatives and human rights defenders from Latin America participated in it (Clark 1995, 175).



relatives and of their position vis-à-vis the state. Conceptually, the main difference between these two concepts is the agent of the disappearances. Enforced disappearances are defined by the involvement of state actors as the agents of the disappearance, either by direct commission or through its authorisation, support or acquiescence. This would be then the archetypal definition of the crime. When the same crimes are not committed by state actors or where the authorisation, support or acquiescence cannot be proved, crimes can be defined simply as disappearances.

This difference has major implications in terms of the state's responsibilities. In the case of enforced disappearances, the state as the agent of the crime is liable for the responsibility of the crime itself. Besides this, it is responsible for the search of the disappeared, the return to the families, the investigation of the culprits, for administering the reparations, creating the conditions for the non-repetition of the crime, and for creating legal frameworks to prevent and sanction enforced disappearances. In the case of disappearances, the state is not responsible for committing the crime, but it is answerable for the other derived responsibilities.

As Gatti affirms, enforced disappearances are defined by what they do not have and what they deny. '(T)here is *absence* (of a body, of data), there is *clandestinity* (of the procedure, of the place), there is *concealment* (of the act and the whereabouts), there is *deprivation* (of the space of legality)' (Gatti 2014, 114–15). Being a crime defined by what it is not, the investigation and uncovering the truth in these crimes is key to define them, and to determine if it is a case of disappearance or enforced disappearance or if and to what extent state agents are involved. If commission of the crime by an agent of the state is hard to prove, proving support, authorisation or acquiescence is even harder. Therefore, the conceptual definition of both disappearances and enforced disappearances is problematic as the criteria for them is difficult to be proven, which reflects in turn the complexities of the crime itself. This explains why relatives of the disappeared in Mexico have been working at least since 2015 to create a new figure of 'disappearances by private citizens', to tackle some of the issues they have encountered when confronted to the previous definitions.

### **2.2.1 Limitations of the Concept of Enforced Disappearance for the Mexican Context**

Mexico has signed more than 200 international treaties in which human rights are recognised, among them, the Inter American and the International Conventions on Disappearances. Nonetheless, it has lodged reservations to both conventions that interfere with their proper implementation. Moreover, the definitions that arise from the conventions explained above do not respond to the contemporary Mexican experience, which surpasses the archetypal definition of enforced disappearances, and in many cases correspond to disappearances carried out without the involvement of state actors. In this section I analyse the implications of the reservations made by Mexico on the international conventions, as well as the necessity and consequences of reflecting on definitions of disappearances.

Mexico signed the Inter American Convention on Forced Disappearance of Persons (from 1994) in 2001, in the context of the period of an alternation in power in which the federal government implemented transitional justice measures.<sup>21</sup> In 2002, Mexico ratified the Inter American Convention but lodged a reservation and an interpretative declaration. The former allows military personnel to be tried in military courts (which is forbidden in the Convention), and the latter explains that the Convention will only be applicable to cases committed after its entry into force, which leaves hundreds of cases from the late 1960s onwards in impunity (Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores n.d.; L. S. Castillo 2003). According to AI, '(t)he ratification of the Convention with this reservation and interpretative declaration casts serious doubts on the real commitment of this government to end impunity' (Amnesty International 2002). After the Inter American Court on Human Rights had declared the reservation invalid in 2009, the Supreme Court of Justice ruled in 2011 that civil courts should try military personnel who have committed human rights violations against civilians. Moreover, the Mexican Senate sanctioned the reservation regarding military trial for military offenders in 2014. Nonetheless, military courts can still try military officials who have committed human rights violations against military personnel.

A similar situation occurs with the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons against Enforced Disappearances. Mexico signed it in 2007, but did not recognise the competence of the UNCED to receive individual cases and Inter-State complaints. The UNCED has urged Mexico to speed '(t)he recognition of the competence of the CED to examine individual complaints and inter-State complaints under Articles 31 and 32 of the Convention' (World Organisation Against Torture n.d.). By not recognising this competence, Mexico seriously restricts the reach of the CED's work. As stated by AI regarding the Inter American Convention, 'the rhetoric of human rights is easy to adopt, but turning these principles into practice and positive change is what counts, and this requires the political will to see changes through at every level of the state and in every corner of the country' (Amnesty International 2002). Although the signing of this convention is an important step towards the end of the disappearances, it is not sufficient, especially if the human rights discourse is rhetorically affirmed but yet to be put into practice.

Besides the problem of the adjustment of Mexico to the international legal documents it has signed, a second difficulty arises in terms of a legal framework for disappearances in the country. The legal category of enforced disappearance is challenged by new methods of disappearance that are used in Mexico and by the complexity of the context (Robledo Silvestre 2016, 94). As I analyse in depth in the next chapter, disappearances in the second period are many times carried out without the involvement of state actors. Robledo argues that relatives suffer the consequences of disappearances no matter their perpetrator. When it is public servants or private citizens with the support of the state who commit the crime, there is a rupture in terms of the social pact. However, disappearances committed by private citizens alone also have consequences that are deep and sustained in time

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<sup>21</sup> See more on this in Chapter 3.

(Robledo Silvestre 2016, 106–7). According to Robledo, what relatives demand is for the Mexican state to comply with the right of all persons not to be disappeared (Robledo Silvestre 2016, 109).

As I argue throughout the thesis, relatives of the disappeared of the second period in Mexico have benefitted from the legal framework and in general from the previous work of organisations of relatives of the disappeared working in the country and in the region since the 1970s. Nonetheless, the way in which the category is legally conceived has also become an obstacle for them, as their cases do not entirely fit in it in terms of the agents committing the crime. As Gatti explains, the archetypical definition that was created as the result of the work of human rights organisations and relatives of the disappeared whose relatives had been disappeared by members of the state or persons at their service as part of a political decision has been widely adopted as it is sometimes the closest definition there is to their realities. In many contexts, being able to define their cases as disappearances incorporates them into a universal legal phenomenon. For example, Gatti and Rubin explain how a new category -the disappeared- is used in Spain and El Salvador to name an old problem –i.e. the clandestine mass graves of the Franco era and the kidnapping of babies and children by the Salvadoran Army during the civil war-, re-signifying and integrating them to the arena of international humanitarian law and transitional justice frameworks (Rubin 2015; Gatti 2014, 155–56).

In Mexico, when new organisations were created in the second period, the categories disappeared or forcibly disappeared were adopted by relatives. Nonetheless, as Robledo explains, recent disappearances are often carried out for economic gain and the involvement or even acquiescence of members of the state is even more difficult to prove than it was in previous decades. Thus, a discussion on this term has to be carried out to acknowledge the diversity and the changing nature of the crimes (Robledo Silvestre 2012, 2016). As Robledo affirms, ‘the disappearance of persons is excluded discursively from the field to which it had been confined in its origins to locate itself in one of new actors and actions that intentionally dilute responsibilities’. There is a shift ‘from a politically motivated crime, to one in which the motivation is economic, territorial and tactical, coincident with a neoliberal model that has intensified in the last decades’ (Robledo Silvestre 2016, 103). Moreover, the problems of widespread collusion and corruption make the crimes of disappearances and enforced disappearances even harder to distinguish. As the UNWGEID expressed in their visit to Mexico in 2011, the irruption of organised crime at different levels of politics makes the category of enforced disappearance more difficult to discern, as the borders between criminals and authorities are hard to distinguish (Robledo Silvestre 2012, 80).

The relatives of the disappeared and human rights organisations in Mexico have thus organised to address the limitations of thinking only about enforced disappearances with the involvement of the state, as defined in national and international legal documents to pursue a more fitting definition of the crime and, therefore, a pertinent legislation and punishment for it. The National Movement for Our Disappeared in Mexico (Movimiento Nacional por Nuestros Desaparecidos en México) has worked to demand a federal law against enforced disappearances and against disappearances committed by

private citizens. The creation of a federal law against enforced disappearances has been a recurrent recommendation to the Mexico by national and international bodies and organisations. On April 2017, the Senate approved a controversial General Law on Enforced Disappearance of Persons and Disappearances Committed by Private Citizens. In October 2017 the Law was finally approved.<sup>22</sup> Relatives of the disappeared for political reasons had promoted federal laws against this crime before, without success. It is probably because of the international pressure in terms of disappearances, analysed in chapter 7, that the law was finally passed (Becerril and Ballinas 2017; Díaz 2017a; Angel 2017; Campaña Nacional Contra la Desaparición Forzada 2017; Redacción Animal Político 2017).

Just like relatives in the 1970s had to push for the crimes to be included in national and international legal frameworks, the actions of the relatives of the disappeared now in Mexico are also motivated by the intention of giving a legal framework to their own cases, which should also prevent disappearances from occurring. Although the creation of the archetypical category and a legal figure of enforced disappearance was a victory achieved to apprehend what seemed impossible to explain, this category is currently contested by the relatives of the disappeared and its vernacular uses studied and adapted in different contexts (Gatti 2014). In the Colombian legislation, for example, it is not only members of the state who can be responsible for committing enforced disappearances. As a response to the national armed conflict context with guerrillas, paramilitary groups, organised crime, common criminals and the state, all can be considered authors of enforced disappearances (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica 2014b, 154).

Summing up, there is a classic definition of enforced disappearances that results from the work of relatives of the disappeared, which has crystallised in international and regional conventions to prevent and sanction disappearances. Mexico has signed those documents, but imposed restrictions that in practice make its application difficult. In terms of the new cases of disappearances that have occurred in the last decade in Mexico, the full adoption of the conventions is necessary to confront disappearances. In addition, there has also been a need to re define these categories and to create new categories which better tackle the reality on the ground.

### **2.3 When a Loved One is Disappeared: The Uncertainty of a Present Absence**

The legal and dictionary definitions of disappearances and enforced disappearances tell us something about these phenomena, but there is more to the category than what can be found in definitions. To understand disappearances it is fundamental to look at what they mean to the relatives of the

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<sup>22</sup> The Movement has used the slogan 'Not without the families' (Sin las familias ¡no!) to demand their inclusion in the Law against Disappearances. Nonetheless, they have accepted the Law as it is considering that having a General Law, even if flawed, is an important first step. Other collectives, for example the National Campaign against Enforced Disappearances (Campaña Nacional Contra la Desaparición Forzada) have argued that a flawed law does not represent them and that this only revictimises the relatives (Hernández Castillo n.d.; Campaña Nacional Contra la Desaparición Forzada 2017). More on this will be analysed in Chapter 5.

disappeared. The catastrophe of meaning that disappearances imply should be analysed carefully in order to lay the foundations for the following chapters (Gatti 2014). In this section I examine mainly two of the characteristics of disappearances and what implications these have for the relatives of the disappeared. First, the liminal state that disappearances represent being a new state between life and death; and secondly, the constant presence of an absence that disappearances bring with them.

As I will show in this section, disappearances have a deep impact on the lives of those around the disappeared person, which is why they are considered torture committed not only against the disappeared person, but also against those close to the victim (Amnesty International 2016b, 6, 19; Mónaco Felipe 2015, 207; CNDH 2011, 5; Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica 2014b; Oficina del Alto Comisionado para los Derechos Humanos, n.d.). The IACoHR has characterized the suffering and anguish inflicted upon victims' families as 'cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment' (Rodríguez-Pinzón and Martin 2006, 2:117).

In terms of the first main characteristic of disappearances, the liminal state they represent, Oscar Flores Coronado (FUUNDEC-FUUNDEM), father of a disappeared young man said:

(D)isappearance means that someone is not there anymore, as if he had vanished (...). There has to be a word that explains this... this terrible thing that happens to us. (...) I have not found a word (to describe this). It does not cross my mind because I have not been able to digest this word and that is because I do not know anything about my son. I cannot find the word (*desaparecido*). It is not that I would want this word not to exist but I cannot find the right word to name this pitiful event (Flores Coronado 2015).

Disappearances, as he explains, are a complex phenomenon. He does not want this word not to exist, but at the same time it does not represent the complexity of the phenomenon. The breaking of meaning that disappearances bring with them requires a deeper analysis (Gatti 2014). In the accounts on the daily life of the relatives of the disappeared that can be found in different newspapers, books, and films, there are two main topics related to disappearances, namely the difference between disappearances and the death/life distinction, which therefore implies an enduring sense of uncertainty and the permanent presence of an absence. In *Ayotzinapa, horas eternas*, Paula Mónaco explains the first hours of the students who survived the police attacks and the coming to terms with the word disappeared: 'some of them know of cases of people disappeared for political reasons in the 1970s, others have heard of recent cases, but many don't have the slightest idea of what this is about. (...) *Disappeared* sounds like something that doesn't exist. But their classmates do exist! It sounds like someone just left, but police officers in uniform took them away!' (Mónaco Felipe 2015, 82; Catela 2001; J. Peña 2014; Calderón 2014).

In a binary world of life and death, disappearances represent a liminal state between being and not being (Morbiato 2017, 147), 'a new state of being, no less' (Gatti 2014, 30). Disappearances are not, as the RAE defines, a euphemism of death. In Argentina in the 1970s and 1980s the disappeared could be living for years in clandestine prisons. Similarly, today in Mexico some of the disappeared

are probably imprisoned or forcibly working in countless activities. The complexity of disappearances is that the victims of disappearance could be dead but they could also be alive. The international legislation analysed in the previous section is clear on that matter.

The uncertainty on the fate of the disappeared and the state they are in is evident when relatives have to make a decision in terms of the verb tense when speaking of their disappeared loved ones. I have heard over the years how speaking of the disappeared in the past tense would be equivalent to killing them. Lourdes Valdivia (FUUNDEC) remembers Rosario Ibarra's words on a Mother's Day demonstration in Mexico City. 'She told us that her son had disappeared in the 1970s. She told us that we should never say that our children are dead (...) so when I speak about him (Lourdes' son) I always speak in the present tense, as if he were here. I do not know where he is, but he is here' (Valdivia Hernández 2015). In her book *Missing* Jenny Edkins elaborates on this difficulty when talking about the people missing after the 9/11 attacks. 'A confusion of tenses betrays the uncertainty the relatives are trying to hold on to'. For some features or characteristics, like the clothes they were wearing or where they work, the relatives can use the past tense, but to describe their personality or way of being they use the present tense (Edkins 2011, 20). Even when these are two different situations in their origins, certain impacts on the relatives can be similar. The complication and at the same time the importance of the use of certain verb tenses is one of this.

In the section 'Vida' (Life) of the book *Ayotzinapa, horas eternas*, which contains the biographies of the 43 Ayotzinapa disappeared students, López de Cea and Mónaco Felipe affirm: 'we talk about the disappeared in the present tense because they were taken alive. To talk about them in the past tense would be to accept a death without proof and with that to consent that any state can erase people, materially and symbolically' (Mónaco Felipe and López de Cea 2015). Even though the authors know that states can and do 'erase' people, by talking about the students in the present tense they choose to preserve their lives –even if only symbolically- until and if their death is confirmed. In this case, speaking of the relatives in the present tense is also to take a political stand against states and individuals and their insistence in the possibility of people being disappeared and killed without resistance.

This varies with the context. While in countries like Argentina, Chile, Guatemala, Peru and Uruguay there is now an almost absolute certainty of death regarding the disappeared, the panorama is different in Mexico. In Argentina for example, the fate of the disappeared became a matter for public debate on many occasions. After the dictatorship ended and the disappeared were not freed, after the trials to the Juntas, the exhumations of mass graves, and the confessions of some military officials a decade after the trials, the reality of the death of the disappeared became more evident than ever.<sup>23</sup> Robben argues that the disappeared as a category changed from 'someone alive yet missing into someone dead yet unaccounted for' (Robben 2005b). Even if relatives may now know that their loved

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<sup>23</sup> On how the relatives of the disappeared in Argentina gained knowledge of what had happened, see: Mónaco Felipe 2015, 181; Feitlowitz 1998.

ones are not living anymore, they are still considered disappeared, and in many cases when their remains are identified, they are still considered disappeared with remains found.

Someone who had been disappeared during the dictatorship in Argentina and was freed narrates how the mechanisms used by the Junta are now known, but they were not as clear at the time. Despite all the information on these mechanisms and the responsibilities, the whereabouts of the majority of the disappeared are still unknown, and with the accounts of bodies burned and of alive persons thrown to the sea from military airplanes the possibility of getting to know the truth about what happened to every single disappeared is small. Nonetheless, the death of the disappeared seems to be a widely accepted reality (Gatti 2014; Feitlowitz 1998)

In Brazil, Bolivia, Chile, Guatemala, El Salvador, Uruguay, among others, Truth Commissions have been put in place to comply with the right to the truth, which has given civil society a frame to understand disappearances and the likely fate of the disappeared (Hayner 2002, 1994; May 2013). Besides this, some countries in the region have also had different scales of prosecutions on perpetrators of the human rights violations, which has also made the issue of disappearances take the public stage.

In Mexico there has not been a public acknowledgement of what happened to the disappeared. There have been official investigations on the cases of the disappearances of the 1960s onwards, but their results have been limited and they have not been made widely available. Furthermore, they have not been supported or approved by the majority of the relatives of the disappeared.<sup>24</sup> Alicia De los Ríos, whose mother was disappeared in 1978, spoke of the difficulty of thinking about the fate of the disappeared of the 1970s because of the limited information available and because of the relatively scarce amount of public testimonies of both perpetrators and victims. In reference to the context of the Special Prosecutor's Office for Social and Political Movements of the Past (FEMOSPP), De los Ríos affirmed:

It is like this certain death that people talk to you about behind the scenes but never in front of everyone. I think that it is impossible for us to think about extermination or death because we have not seen anything, because everything was hidden from us. Because horror was swallowed by the earth and those who saw that horror do not want to talk about it (De los Ríos Merino 2015).

In the case of the disappearances in the second period, the horror is clearly visible, but there is a lack of a coherent explanation about the fate of the disappeared, about the reasons for the disappearances, and the certainty of who are committing them. The horror is present, but it is present more as a maddening, loud reality than as a certainty that helps to order life. Leticia Hidalgo (FUNDENL) describes it as follows: 'all the terror that existed in that time and has not stopped existing but was more shocking, the context of war that we were living here, all over Nuevo León. It was the

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<sup>24</sup> The failed transitional justice strategy will be analysed in Chapter 3.

time of people hanging from the bridges, of people burnt, of bombings, of grenades exploding, of kidnappings, of vehicle robbery. All of it, it was a very loud context of war' (Hidalgo Rea 2015).

The possibility of death is very present for both periods in Mexico, but the possibility of life also remains. In terms of the disappearances of the 1960s onwards, there are accounts of 'death flights' and of people being tortured to death, but there are also testimonies of people who were freed after years of being disappeared and who have testified to having seen more people being held in clandestine prisons. In the second period, the finding of mass graves with thousands of bodies across the country and infamous characters such as 'El Pozolero' who provide unnerving accounts of how he disposed of hundreds of bodies working for a drug cartel, make the possibility of death an almost certain end for most of the disappeared. In this way a narrative is built: the disappeared are dead (Robledo Silvestre 2012, 83). But there are also testimonies of people who escaped from places where they were forced to work for organised crime. Those accounts serve as a painful reminder of the possibility of life: a life of suffering, but a life that can be found if properly searched for.

Both possibilities, that of death and that of life are difficult to imagine for the relatives of the disappeared. If the person was killed that means that they likely suffered a violent death and their remains have probably not been respected or even preserved. And if the person disappeared is alive, the conditions of that life are probably terrible. They could be subjected to torture or forced to work in dreadful conditions. Both possibilities are almost unbearable. Alicia De los Ríos stated:

(O)ne of the things that always terrorised me, since I was a girl, was to imagine my mother in a dungeon. I could spend very bad moments thinking about that, and this black hole of nothingness in which you imagine them. (...) I kept on thinking about it when I was young, you always have this duality of thinking about them dead-alive, right? (De los Ríos Merino 2015).

There are particular moments that confront the relatives with this complicated new category that does not correspond to life or death, but that is often treated as the latter. One of those moments is the Day of the Dead celebration. This is usually a date when the relatives have to explain and come to terms with the difference between disappearance and death and the importance of not treating the disappeared as if they were dead. As Mónaco Felipe says, during these celebrations 'there are no altars for the disappeared' (Mónaco Felipe 2015, 161). But in this uncertainty of not knowing if their relatives are alive or dead, the certainty is that they are disappeared.

The relatives have to face the constant question regarding their loved ones. Are they alive? Are they dead? My interviews in Chihuahua in April 2015 were marked by the recent discovery of the bodies of a young couple who had been disappeared four years earlier: Claudia Gabriela Chávez Arámbula (18) and Emmanuel Hernández Castillo (22) (Mayorga 2015b). Almost all of the relatives with whom I spoke there made reference to this event. It was the reminder of the possibility of death, and with it, the possibility of an end to a search. Carmen de Jesús Ventura, whose son was disappeared in 2013, affirmed:



What is preferable? For example this people who found their relatives, who knew that yes, they are them... You can imagine what would I give for that. Well, one is not happy with what happens, right? But at least one would say OK. But if they are not dead, then...? (...) Then you cry for them anyway because they are not with you (de Jesús Ventura 2015).

Mónaco Felipe writes: 'having a disappeared relative is living in an abyss of doubts. Sometimes you want to know the truth and other times you prefer to keep on with that doubt that hurts you at the same time that keeps you standing' (Mónaco Felipe 2015, 90). In terms of keeping hope alive, many mothers of disappeared persons have told me that they would be able to feel if their loved ones had been killed. On this, Mónaco Felipe says 'to believe in a remote possibility is not to be naïve: it is the intelligence of the heart and of the guts. If they did not believe that someday they will find their disappeared, they could not keep on living' (Mónaco Felipe 2015, 130). For many of the mothers and relatives of the disappeared, thinking that they can still be alive helps them in continuing their search. Both the possibility of life and that of death mark the ways they look for them. Many of these relatives who await and demand their disappeared relatives be returned alive, and who look for them in prisons and demand the opening of the clandestine prisons, also search for them in the morgue, in mass graves, and in the mountains, with pick and shovel in hand.<sup>25</sup> Thus, the uncertainty of the fate of the disappeared serves also as a motor for the search.

The uncertainty of disappearances is presented in Mexico in many levels. Firstly, the uncertainty in terms of life and death. Secondly, the uncertainty of the possibility of finding the bodies if the disappeared are dead. Many of the bodies have been dissolved in acid, burned or cremated by organised crime (Sin Embargo 2016; P. Ovalle and Díaz Tovar n.d.), but they can also have been cremated by the authorities before a positive identification was made. FUNDEJ, in Jalisco, has been active in denouncing the cremation of bodies against the international standards regarding disappearances (FUNDEJ 2015). And thirdly, if bodies are actually found, there is an uncertainty in terms of their identification. The ever more frequent stories of bodies being disintegrated in different ways, along with the lack of investigation from the authorities and the lack of trust in them seem to condemn relatives to a continued uncertainty. Mónaco Felipe writes: 'How painful this double doubt can be! The uncertainty of having a disappeared relative and no trustworthy authority, the feeling that a credible truth will never come' (Mónaco Felipe 2015, 181). While in other countries like Guatemala, Peru or Argentina identifications are made by independent forensic teams or by agencies trusted by the relatives, the case in Mexico is different, as there does not seem to be capacity or a political will to identify the disappeared. Because of this, many of the efforts of the groups of relatives, as I show in chapter 4, are dedicated to find and identify the disappeared, which according to the international legislation would be state tasks.

The different levels of uncertainty associated to disappearances have deep psychosocial impacts. A recurrent topic when examining the impacts of disappearances on the relatives is the impossibility of

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<sup>25</sup> See *Flowers in the Desert* for an account of relatives searching in the desert in Chile (Allen 2013).

the relatives of the disappeared of having a normal grieving process because there is no body to mourn. 'Unfinished death' or 'unattended grief' are categories that have been used to explain the process in which a body is missing to certify the death and relatives cannot then follow a normal grieving process. Panizo defines unattended grief as the grief in which there is no body to be mourned and no rituals to mark the death. Da Silva Catela explains disappearances as an inconclusive death, where there is a beginning but not an end (Panizo, n.d.; Catela 2001). Both authors write about the disappeared in Argentina and their terminology is probably more adequate to that reality. As Barrantes argues, different relatives in different realities need different things, and even though disappearances as a category share several characteristics, they also have particularities depending on the context (Quirk and Casco 1994; Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica 2014a). In the case of Mexico, the category of ambiguous loss that has also been applied to disappearances elsewhere is more appropriate to the type of loss experienced by relatives of the disappeared. This term implies an ongoing loss in which the loved one is physically absent but kept psychologically present (Boss and Yeats 2014a, 63). To think about loss in these terms respects the ambiguity of disappearances in terms of the possibilities of life and death analysed above, of the absence of a body and of the particular contexts, instead of thinking that all that the relatives need is a body to mourn and thus have closure.<sup>26</sup>

The second characteristic of disappearances is the constant presence of an absence that 'occupies too much space'.<sup>27</sup> In this regard, Gatti affirms: '(the disappeared) exist as a present absence. *Exist*, not *are*, because disappearance entails permanence in an impossible state' (Gatti 2014, 30). This presence of an absence is manifest in different stories. Even though Brandon was disappeared in 2009, her sister still buys him presents for when he returns (Alvarado 2015). Diana Iris, whose son Daniel was disappeared in 2007, keeps his room just as it was before being disappeared, waiting for his return (Amnesty International 2013). And there are thousands of stories just like these, of families leaving an empty chair during the Christmas dinner, of families who have not moved houses in decades waiting for the return of the disappeared (J. Peña 2014; Gómez Lvoff and De Vecchi Gerli 2008).

That ambiguous loss, the absence's presence in daily life is constant. Poniatowska recounts that in a conversation with Rosario Ibarra on a rainy day Ibarra left the room and on her return, she was crying. When Poniatowska asked why Ibarra was crying, she answered: 'I thought that wherever he is, my boy must be getting wet' (Poniatowska 1980, 80).<sup>28</sup> The question then is not only if the disappeared are alive or not, but *how* they are. And how they are at every single moment. These kinds of questions are always asked by the relatives of the disappeared. Is he or she getting wet? Is he or she

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<sup>26</sup> See De Vecchi and Gómez for a discussion on grief on the children of people disappeared for political reasons in Mexico (Gómez Lvoff and De Vecchi Gerli 2008).

<sup>27</sup> Mónaco Felipe's parents were disappeared in Argentina when she was less than one month old, as she recounts in her book. Drawing on her own life, she writes about the experience of the relatives of the 43 disappeared Ayotzinapa students (Mónaco Felipe 2015, 91).

<sup>28</sup> See more on Rosario Ibarra in chapter 4.

cold? Has he or she eaten? (Mónaco Felipe 2015, 81) As an example of this, in the re-counting of the first hours after the disappearance of the 43 Ayotzinapa students, Mónaco shows the anguish of the relatives: 'Where are they? Have they eaten? Are they being tortured? The questions bring them to an abyss of terror'. One of the parents said: 'I'm always thinking about my son and some ideas get in to my head: Is he being tortured? Is he being fed? Is he being forced to work in the mountains or with the *sicarios*?' (Mónaco Felipe 2015, 138) The constant preoccupation for the disappeared's wellbeing is an endless source of anguish and stress. The knowledge of where the disappeared might be adds questions on their wellbeing in terms of torture, forced labour, etc. Everyday things such as listening to a song, drinking a beer or going out for dinner, can all be reminders of the absence of the loved one and of the uncertainty of their fate.

There are moments when that absence seems to penetrate everything. Birthdays, Christmas, and New Year's Eve celebrations, as well as graduations, weddings; all the moments that families usually spend together are now shaped by this absence. The anniversary of the disappearance usually becomes a day to be marked in calendars. Each one of these dates are reminders that the time has passed and that the uncertainty and the absence are still there, but the disappeared is not.<sup>29</sup>

The uncertainty about the fate of the victim has severe impacts in the lives of the relatives. The previously mentioned alteration of daily life and the permanent presence of a painful absence impact on the relationships within the family and provoke physical and mental health issues for the relatives. Many of the relatives end up developing health problems that are frequently mistreated or badly treated, as their priority is usually searching for the disappeared, and their resources are destined to that end (Espinoza 2016; Mónaco Felipe 2015; F. Rodríguez 2017). Laura Flores (FUUNDEC) said:

Health starts to be affected because psychologically -you cannot see it- but this affects us, a lot of us, even if we make the effort to get up every day. (...) it is an open wound and you make the effort one, two days, and then it knocks you down, you cannot get up. (...) Some *compañeras* have died, some from diabetes, others because... little by little so much burnout affects you. (...) I physically feel the damage that this is doing when time passes by (Flores M. 2015).

As mentioned above, enforced disappearances are considered a continuous crime in which the offence is committed every day until the fate of the disappeared person is known. Thinking about the ongoing nature of this phenomenon helps in understanding the impact it has, and why relatives might describe it as an open wound (Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances, n.d.).

In many cases, the search for the disappeared leaves the family without financial resources to deal with these illnesses. When the person is disappeared, other members of the family have to take over their economical and practical responsibilities. The family has to adjust to a new reality, without

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<sup>29</sup> As will be analysed in Chapter 6, some of these dates become days of remembering and of demanding the return of the disappeared. See Catela for an account on the lives of relatives of the disappeared in Argentina (Catela 2001).

knowing if this adjustment is going to be temporary or permanent. In many cases the family invests all of their resources in the search for the disappeared person, many times undertaking responsibilities that should be met by different state agencies, losing money and property in this endeavour. The disappearances mark a before and after in the lives of the relatives (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica 2014a, 51).

One of the consequences of the liminal state of disappearances is the complication that arise when trying to solve daily problems. Relatives of the disappeared in different countries have been confronted with the difficulties that arise as a consequence of debts, mortgages, insurance, and even the regular managing of bank accounts, as well as the observance of regular processes such as registering children, getting them passports, among other things. For decades, relatives of the disappeared in Mexico have had to sign a 'presumption of death' document in order to be able to solve these issues. Signing this document is itself an act of torture and a moral conflict for the relatives who, not being sure about the fate of their loved ones, have to presume their death (*La Crónica de Chihuahua* 2016; Robledo Silvestre 2012, 83, 85). As a result of the struggle of the relatives of the disappeared and human rights organisations, and drawing upon other experiences in the region, there are a few states in Mexico where relatives can now ask for a declaration of absence due to disappearance. This mechanism was also added to the Penal Code in the context of the approval of the Federal Law against Disappearances in 2017. This gives a legal status to the disappeared person, respecting the characteristics of this crime.<sup>30</sup>

Referring to the Argentine National Commission on Disappeared Persons (CONADEP), which has archives with documents of 8,960 cases of people disappeared during the last military coup, Gatti writes:

They found a powerful and paradoxical solution: they certify that a person was detained and disappeared, they produce the inscription that indicates that that person is neither alive nor dead, nor merely absent, but detained-disappeared; they produce documents from the state so that the state will recognize the peculiar citizenship status (...) (Gatti 2014, 47).

The declaration of absence due to disappearance has a similar effect in Mexico, as it is an official document in which the status of disappearance is recognised. As happens with the verb tense and with the presumption of death, relatives can keep on doing what they do with all the complications of having a disappeared relative, but it is not necessary for them to declare their loved ones dead. When someone is disappeared, relatives can keep on accumulating debts and can be prevented from accessing services or keeping properties under the name of the disappeared (*La Crónica de Chihuahua* 2016). With this document, the rights of the disappeared person are respected and put in pause in case they return, while the rights of their family are protected as well in the meantime (Citroni 2014).

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<sup>30</sup> For examples of this dispute in Peru, see Reátegui. In Colombia, see Robledo (Rangel de León 2014; Alonso 2015; R. J. Pacheco 2015; Robledo Silvestre 2012, 86; Reátegui 2012).

In Mexico, as elsewhere, the search for the disappeared is also surrounded by the danger it involves. Many of the relatives who are searching for their loved ones are frequently criminalised, harassed and threatened, while some have been attacked, killed or disappeared as a result of their struggle to find their disappeared relatives and justice (Amnesty International 2016b, 15–16). The cases of Martha Loya, Artemisa Ibarra, Nepomuceno Moreno, Cornelia Guevara Guerrero, and Norma Angélica Bruno Román are only a few examples of relatives of the disappeared who have been killed or disappeared themselves while looking for their loved ones (Mayorga 2015a; Quintana S. 2011; P. Martínez 2013; *CNN Mexico* 2011; Barrera 2016; Redacción AN 2015a). In this context, some relatives of the disappeared are taking measures for their bodies to be easily identified in case they were to be disappeared, revealing how aware they are of the conditions of violence permeating the cities they live in but also of the increasing risks they assume while looking for the disappeared. Talking about the response to the London bombings of 2005 and about bodies treated as bare life, Edkins says: '(w)e need to take note before we all become nothing more than a list of physical characteristics and distinguishing marks, dead bodies in all but name' (Edkins 2008, 232). It seems that at least in some places of Mexico where violence, killings, and disappearances are a common reality, people are already feeling the terror of being just bodies ready to be disposed of.

Disappearances change meaning and require the creation of new categories and life strategies. But in this scenario, many relatives of the disappeared organise collectively to fight for the return of the disappeared. As Gatti puts it, 'there is life after the tsunami' (Gatti 2014, 160). The following chapters engage in this life after the tsunami, specifically in terms of the battles for memory that relatives of the disappeared and human rights organisations carry out to bring back the disappeared and to bring truth and justice.

## CHAPTER 3 THE RECENT HISTORY OF DISAPPEARANCES IN MEXICO

The main objective of this thesis is to understand the battles for memory around the disappeared in Mexico. For this analysis, understanding i) how the disappearances took place, ii) who perpetrated them, and iii) the broader context in which the disappearances happened will prove useful in order to explore the interaction between the relatives of the disappeared and the different agencies of the state over time.

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first section presents the context in which the PRIista regime used enforced disappearances as one of the ways to deal with political opponents from the late 1960s to the 1980s. The characterisation of that period of political upheaval and a quick look to the responses implemented by the regime to deal with the dissidents will serve as a broader context for understanding the regime's use of enforced disappearances. The second section discusses the period from the mid-2000s until now, when disappearances occurred in the context of violence during the so-called 'War on Drugs'. This chapter examines the militarisation of the fight against drugs, and the human rights violations that this has brought about. As this chapter will show, disappearances in Mexico occurred in two very different contexts, which have marked the interaction between the local and federal governments and the relatives of the disappeared.

It is important to briefly mention the different sources that were available to me to write the sections about the two periods analysed below. Both sections were written with a blend of primary and secondary sources, but these were different for each period. For the first period, there is an important body of scholarly production on the history of guerrillas, the history of disappearances and the history of repression by the Mexican state, even if this is scarce compared to similar productions in other Latin American countries. In addition to this literature, some contemporary accounts have been used to illustrate some points (e.g. the Tlatelolco massacre). For the second period, I generally used some historiographical and academic analysis, particularly in terms of the context in which disappearances have occurred, but because this is a developing issue many of the sources used are primary sources, such as human rights reports and journalistic accounts of the disappearances.

### 3.1 Enforced Disappearances during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s

#### 3.1.1 Social Unrest and Governmental Responses

The Mexican government started using enforced disappearances as a systematic practice in the late 1960s as one of the strategies to deal with political opponents.<sup>31</sup> The context in which these

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<sup>31</sup> See Chapter 1 regarding the first registered enforced disappearance in Mexico.

disappearances occurred was one of social unrest, in which the PRIísta regime implemented many other ways of dealing with opponents. During the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s, teachers, railroad workers, doctors, among others, organised protests and took to the streets in different cities in the country to protest against the status quo. The teachers' strike for a salary raise in 1958, the railroad workers' strikes in 1958 and 1959 for pay raises and union democratisation; and the doctors' protest movement in 1964 and 1965 proved to be a challenge for the federal government. They wanted better salaries, improved work conditions, more democratic unions and a reduction of social inequality in the country (Stevens 1974). The regime responded through co-optation, intervention in the unions and harassment, and imprisonment and assassination (Carr 1992; Middlebrook 1995; Padilla 2008; Montemayor Romo de Vivar 2010; Aguila and Bortz 2012).

Along with these social uprisings, 1968 was the year of the student protest movement.<sup>32</sup> Tens of thousands of students took to the streets to demand the implementation of certain changes from the federal government that were more political than directly related with education.<sup>33</sup> After trying to implement measures to deal with the student protest movement, the government resorted to repression. For authors like Montemayor and Serra, repression was the first choice for the Mexican government in dealing with opponents. Others, such as Witherspoon, disagree. According to him, the Mexican government preferred to deal with opponents in quieter and less overt ways. When a movement started to be a problem for the government, its leaders were co-opted and the movement silenced. Besides this, groups were silenced through the government-controlled media. If all failed, then the government used force to silence its opponents. The government also co-opted some student leaders and used the media to portray the students as a threat before the Tlatelolco massacre (Serra 2006; Montemayor Romo de Vivar 2010; Montemayor 2010; Witherspoon 2008; Pensado 2013).

On October 2<sup>nd</sup> the government repressed a peaceful rally in Plaza de las Tres Culturas, Tlatelolco. The number of casualties remains unknown. The federal government recognised the death of nearly forty people, while others estimate more than three hundred.<sup>34</sup> The media reported the government's version, which was that what happened at the Plaza was not a massacre, but a shooting started by the students.<sup>35</sup> Recently declassified documents appear to confirm the hypothesis that the

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<sup>32</sup> As I analyse in Chapter 6, the massacre on October 2<sup>nd</sup> 1968 has gained a particularly important place in terms of memory of state violence in Mexico.

<sup>33</sup> See the movements' demands in Pensado. For a discussion on contemporary laws that criminalise social discontent, see Montemayor, and Linares (Pensado 2013, 109; Poniatowska 1975; Carr 1992; Castellanos 2007; Montemayor Romo de Vivar 2010; Stevens 1970; Linares 2014).

<sup>34</sup> Witherspoon provides an account of the 2<sup>nd</sup> of October and how the attacks to the students happened. See also: (Poniatowska 1975; Scherer García, Monsiváis, and García Barragán 1999; Montemayor Romo de Vivar 2010)

<sup>35</sup> For the headlines of the main newspapers, see Poniatowska. For the treatment of the event in the press see Brewster (Poniatowska 1975; Brewster 2002).

Presidential Guard started the killing.<sup>36</sup> The Mexican judiciary system deemed the massacre a genocide, but Echeverría's responsibility for the act was not confirmed (G. Castillo 2014a; Camil 2009; Consejo de la Judicatura Federal 2009).

Poniatowska has called this year a turning point, while Witherspoon defines it as a landmark in Mexican history. Others are more reluctant to call it that. Pensado considers the Tlatelolco massacre a social wound more than a watershed. For him, opposition to the student protest movement made possible the 'suture' of that wound, leaving a scar in the social tissue, but not one that could seriously damage the regime. The extent to which Tlatelolco did or did not serve as a step forward for the country's democratisation is beyond the scope of this work, but its importance has to be stated. For Middlebrook, the student massacre resulted in a decrease of the legitimacy of the regime's 'revolutionary credentials' by highlighting some of the contradictions between the development of the Mexican state and its revolutionary promises. This decrease in the regime's credibility later resulted in disillusionment, and these two factors account for some of the political changes of the PRI in the 1970s (described below) (Poniatowska 1975; Witherspoon 2008, 105; Pensado 2013, 203–4; Middlebrook 1986, 126).

Almost three years after the Tlatelolco massacre, the students rallied together and were attacked again in a demonstration in Mexico City in June 10<sup>th</sup>, 1971. The Hawks, a paramilitary group sponsored by the federal government and with FBI trained leaders, killed an unknown number of young women and men (Aguayo 2001; Montemayor Romo de Vivar 2010). Even though the government ordered this repression, then President Echeverría (1970-1976) treated the killing as an act of international provocation. The press and public opinion condemned the attack, but followed the federal government's interpretation of an international provocation behind it. Echeverría's claim of an external force behind the attacks did not help to bring the attackers to justice or to investigate the events (Poniatowska 1980; Montemayor Romo de Vivar 2010). President Echeverría had started a 'democratic opening': political prisoners were released, and there was an increase in social expenditure on housing, welfare, and education. These changes came along with a reduction in the voting age and for eligibility to stand for the Senate. Finally, leftist parties were created, some of them aligned with the PRI (Carr 1992; Castellanos 2007). Sometimes the history of Mexican guerrillas is presented only as the result of the massacres of October 1968 and June 1971, but guerrilla movements started before those years in a context where workers, peasants, students, and *colono* organisations were gaining ground as new actors of the Mexican left (Carr 1992, 5).

### 3.1.2 Mexican Guerrillas

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<sup>36</sup> Scherer García, Monsiváis, and García Barragán, *Parte de Guerra, Tlatelolco 1968*; Montemayor Romo de Vivar, *La Violencia de Estado En México*.



Rural guerrillas started in Guerrero with the uprising of Genaro Vázquez in 1968, whereas urban guerrillas have their roots in Rubén Jaramillo's struggles and in the attack to the Madera barracks in 1965. A series of circumstances, which were both internal and external to the Mexican context, caused the guerrilla uprising from the mid-1950s onwards. In the internal arena, the repression of social movements, the co-optation of opponents to the regime, the impossibility to participate in elections and the weakness of the Left were some of the causes (Carr 1992; Montemayor 2010; Montemayor Romo de Vivar 2010; Castellanos 2007; Serra 2006). In the external arena, the Cold War, the Cuban Revolution, and the uprising of other guerrilla movements around the world and in Latin America, were of particular importance for the birth of guerrillas in Mexico (Montemayor Romo de Vivar 2010; Castellanos 2007; Padilla 2008). The rural and urban guerrillas were not completely separated and some rural guerrillas had urban support bases and vice versa. Nonetheless, for analytical purposes, I have presented them here in two sections in order to introduce the ways in which each of them were repressed depending on their characteristics.

### ***Rural Guerrillas***

The situation in Mexico's countryside has historically been of enormous poverty and marginalisation. After the 1940s the regime opted for 'a capitalist modernisation program that impoverished the Mexican countryside to subsidize industrialisation and large-scale agrobusiness' (Aviña 2014, 10). This resulted in people organising in different parts of the country to demand land, create cooperatives or fight the local bosses. The federal government responded to these organisations using the state apparatus and with a mixture of co-optation and repression (Serra 2006; Padilla 2007, 2008, 2001; Middlebrook 1986, 125). Being one of the most marginalised states in Mexico, Guerrero has been home to various resistance movements which have been subject to local and federal state repression (Padilla 2001, 2007, 2008; Montemayor Romo de Vivar 2010). Guerrero was also home to the two main rural guerrillas of the second half of the twentieth century led by Lucio Cabañas and Genaro Vázquez, respectively.

Both Cabañas and Vázquez participated in the legal Left, and only took up arms after the authorities closed the legal channels to make a reform through the repression of its demonstrations.<sup>37</sup> Cabañas was a rural schoolteacher who led a rural guerrilla in Guerrero from 1967 to 1974. After participating in the legal Left, and having witnessed repression in the form of harassment, imprisonment, and killings, he decided to continue the struggle, but now taking up arms. Cabañas created the Armed Commandos of Guerrero (Comandos Armados de Guerrero, later the Peasant Justice Brigade, Brigada de Ajusticiamiento Campesino) and the Party of the Poor (Partido de los Pobres, PDLP). He aimed to spread guerrillas all over the country in order to overthrow the government and to build a new society without oppression. In 1974 Cabañas's guerrilla kidnapped the senator and later

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<sup>37</sup> For an enlightening account of Cabañas and Vázquez's legal battles and the repression that pushed them to start guerrilla movements, see Aviña 2014.

governor of Guerrero, Rubén Figueroa and Cabañas was killed when the army rescued Figueroa. After this, state violence in Guerrero intensified.

The other Guerrero guerrilla leader, Genaro Vázquez, was also a teacher who funded the Guerreran Civic Committee (Comité Cívico Guerrerense, CCG). He then participated in the teachers' protest movement in 1958, and in 1960 the Committee was transformed into the Guerreran Civic Association (Asociación Cívica Guerrerense, ACG). Vázquez started the armed struggle in 1968, and in that year the ACG became the Revolutionary National Civic Association (Asociación Cívica Nacional Revolucionaria, ACNR). This guerrilla had great support from the peasants, which made it difficult to eliminate. At a time when the guerrilla was gaining national attention, Vázquez died in 1972 in a car accident, although his family and political organisations have argued that the Mexican Army murdered him (Aviña 2014).<sup>38</sup> According to Aviña, 'his death and the demise of the ACNR represented a military victory of sorts for the regime but failed to eradicate the subversive longings and memories in rural Guerrero that nourished the guerrilla group in the first place' (Aviña 2014, 135).

### ***Urban Guerrillas***

Rubén Jaramillo's guerrilla and the attack on the Madera Barracks in Chihuahua are the two precursors of the urban guerrillas of the 1970s and 1980s. Jaramillo was the leader of the first modern guerrilla in Mexico, rising up in arms first in 1943 and then in 1953 in Morelos. Both uprisings were responses to an increase in the governmental repression and persecution towards peasants and workers, and to the impossibility of obtaining redress in the legal arena. Jaramillo had fought with Zapata during the Mexican Revolution, and he later fought for better conditions for workers and peasants across the country. Fighting both in the legal system and within the armed struggle, Jaramillo became an important figure for social movements in Mexico. His protest movements were persecuted and repressed by the government, until he was finally killed in 1962 by the army and judicial police. Rubén Jaramillo had received two presidential amnesties after taking up arms, the last of which had been granted by President López Portillo in 1958, four years before he was assassinated.<sup>39</sup> Jaramillo's struggle started as a self-defense armed movement but became a programmatic struggle inspired by the Cuban Revolution. This movement is, according to Padilla, the perfect example of social actors' radicalisation as the result of state repression (Padilla 2007, 281, 2008, 2001, 2007; Poniatowska 1980; Hodges and Gandy 2002; Castellanos 2007).

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<sup>38</sup> For a history of the Mexican armed struggle see Castellanos. For more on Mexican rural guerrilla, see Castellanos 2007; Montemayor Romo de Vivar 2010; Padilla 2001, 2007, 2008; Hodges and Gandy 2002; Aviña 2014.

<sup>39</sup> For more on Jaramillo's amnesties and on PRI's use of this figure as a first step to co-option, see Padilla 2008, 105.

The attack on the Madera Barracks, the other precedent of urban guerrillas, was executed on September 23, 1965, inspired by the Cuban attacks on the Moncada barracks (1953). Besides its Cuban inspiration, the guerrilla group followed the Jaramillista movement, and represented the radicalisation of a regional struggle for land in Chihuahua. The majority of the guerrillas were killed, but the event had a great influence on later Mexican guerrilla groups. One of the largest guerrillas during the 1970s and 1980s, the Communist League 23 September (Liga Comunista 23 de septiembre, LC23S) used the date of the attack on the Madera barracks for its name, and called their newspaper *Madera*. Some of the relatives of the guerrillas killed during the attack formed guerrilla groups later on (Castellanos 2007).

Montemayor affirms that since 1965 there has been a permanent situation of uprisings of armed movements in Mexico that had its most concentrated stage between 1971 and 1977.<sup>40</sup> The guerrillas rose up mainly in Chihuahua, Guadalajara, Nuevo León, Mexico City, Michoacán, and Sonora.<sup>41</sup> Aguayo lists 29 guerrilla groups in Mexico during the 1960s and 1970s. The biggest one was the LC23S with around 350 members in many cities. Aguayo offers a comparison between guerrillas in Mexico and in other Latin American countries. There were 1,860 guerrillas in Mexico, which as a total number is large, but as the force was divided in almost 30 groups the actual threat to the state was probably less than what it had been if all the members had been integrated in only one group (Aguayo 2001, 312).

Women and men in different parts of the country decided to take up arms against the government as a result of the constraints to participation in the political sphere, the violence against social movements, the lack of representation in the leftist parties and the poverty that had no perspective of getting better. The Cuban Revolution was an inspiration for Mexican guerrillas, just as it was for guerrillas throughout Latin America. The National Liberation Movement, (Movimiento de Liberación Nacional) in support of the Cuban Revolution, counted some who became guerrilla leaders (Rubén Jaramillo, Arturo Gámiz –one of the leaders of the Madera barracks attack-, Genaro Vázquez, and Lucio Cabañas) amongst its members (Carr 1992; Hodges and Gandy 2002; Castellanos 2007). The Second Vatican Council, the Medellín Conference and the Theology of Liberation also influenced the Mexican guerrillas (Pensado 2014). Radical Christians, students, peasants and workers decided to create or join guerrilla groups as a result of the national and international context (Montemayor Romo de Vivar 2010). With the Cold War as background, the Cuban Revolution was seen as a threat for Latin American governments and as an example of success for the left throughout the continent. The repression of political opponents throughout the continent was part of the fight against international

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<sup>40</sup> Carr and Padilla emphasise the small character of the guerrilla. In the same regard Aguayo affirms that guerrillas were not a real threat for the government, but the intelligence apparatus made the problem seem bigger in order to maintain its funding. Vicente Ovalle claims that the response was not disproportionate, but a plan implemented systematically to attack an internal enemy that had been carefully shaped (Carr 1992; Padilla 2007; Aguayo 2001; Vicente Ovalle 2012, 10).

<sup>41</sup> These regions will be of main importance to understand enforced disappearances and the creation of relatives' organisations. For a full description and chronology of these groups, see Castellanos, *México armado 1943-1981*.

communism promoted by the United States (Menjívar and Rodríguez 2009; Aguayo 2001; Montemayor Romo de Vivar 2010).

### 3.1.3 Dealing with Political Opponents

The second half of the twentieth century saw coups d'état and dictatorships in many Latin American countries. In Mexico, the situation was different. Regular elections took place and the PRIísta regime seemed more stable than others in the region. According to Knight, the Mexican regime did not become a bureaucratic authoritarian regime as described by O'Donnell 'because it did not need to; (as) it already possessed a more discreetly authoritarian system' (Knight 1999, 117). The institutionalisation of the revolution created a regime in which a large part of civil society was included, mainly peasants and unions, so it had the power to maintain a majoritarian coalition.<sup>42</sup> The inclusion of broad sectors co-opted into the regime after the Revolution is a characteristic that contributes to understanding how Mexican politics worked (Carr 1992; Middlebrook 1995; Knight 1999). However, even though repression was not carried out to the same extent as elsewhere, the PRIísta state did rely on violence, and on the restriction of the political opponents for its perpetuation.

For Knight, the Mexican regime carried out a subtler and quotidian form of violence, without resorting to full-scale violence that could damage its image (1968 and the repression of the Zapatistas in the mid-1990s are deviations from the norm for Knight, and many other massacres could be added to that list). Pansters argues that the theory of Mexican exceptionalism has prevented a systematic study of violence and coercion through the Post-Revolutionary period, by stating the flawed explanation 'that state building was based on a combination of economic growth, modest redistribution, mass clientelism, and institutional (non-violent) conflict resolution'. For Rath 'the PRI had already woven the thread of military force subtly into the fabric of the regime, rendering such overt militarisation unnecessary'. Koonings argues that the exceptionality of the Mexican regime in Latin America was not the lack of violence, but the ability of the regime to exercise it while claiming institutional legitimacy and an inclusionary quality (Middlebrook 1995, 119; Rath 2013, 143; Knight 1999; Pansters 2012, 9; Koonings 2012). The way in which repression was carried out impacted on how the relatives of the disappeared interacted with different governments, and on how some measures of transitional justice have been carried out in the country.

The actions against guerrillas were organised by the government in a planned, generalised and systematic way through different agencies from the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of Interior, and then covered up and justified by the press (Aviña 2014; Aguayo 2001; Navarrete Gorjón et al.

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<sup>42</sup> Middlebrook states that since the 1970s there was an academic consensus on the authoritarian nature of the Mexican regime. For a discussion on Mexico's authoritarian characterisations, see Middlebrook. Particularly important are footnotes 6 and 8 (p. 335) (Middlebrook 1995, 2, 3, 335).

2014; Sierra Guzmán 2003). In the rural areas, and principally in the state of Guerrero, guerrillas were repressed using mainly the army and paramilitary groups (Serra 2006; Castellanos 2007). The military campaigns in the region went from social and health aid distributed by the military, to direct violence against guerrillas, their families and the guerrilla's support groups.<sup>43</sup> This violence included cutting off the support base, according to the logic: 'evaporate the water to find and kill the fish' (Aviña 2013; Padilla 2008; Castellanos 2007; Navarrete Gorjón et al. 2014). Entire populations were harassed and having the last name Cabañas was reason enough to be arrested, tortured and disappeared. As a result, Guerrero is the state with more people disappeared during the 1970s, which probably responded to the scale of the guerrilla and its support in comparison to other places. According to the Guerrero Truth Commission (described below), 512 persons were disappeared in Guerrero between 1969 and 1985. AFADEM refers to 600 persons disappeared in Guerrero, 450 of them in the municipality of Atoyac de Álvarez (González Villarreal 2012; Castellanos 2007; Montemayor Romo de Vivar 2010; Navarrete Gorjón et al. 2014; Valadez Luviano 2016).

For the urban guerrilla the strategy was different. The Federal Security Directorate (Dirección Federal de Seguridad, DFS), which was created in 1947 to work under direct orders from the President, targeted the opponents to the regime that were identified as dangerous.<sup>44</sup> The General Directorate of Political and Social Investigations (Dirección General de Investigaciones Políticas y Sociales, DGIPS) was also important in these endeavours. Political opponents and others suspected of being 'the enemy' were followed and in many cases killed. If they were not killed, they were detained by the police, the army, or paramilitary death squads (in many cases without detention orders, and without presenting the detainees to the judicial authorities), and then taken to clandestine prisons where they were tortured, thus forcibly disappearing them. The detainees' imprisonment was denied to the family along with their whereabouts (Aguayo 2001; Montemayor Romo de Vivar 2010; Castellanos 2007; González Villarreal 2012).

The first registered enforced disappearance as part of this strategy was committed in Guerrero in 1969. After this disappearance, the crime was committed regularly by the armed forces, security agencies, paramilitary groups, and death squads. During Echeverría's *sexenio* (1970-1976) the disappearances occurred mostly in rural areas. This period had the highest rate of enforced disappearances in Mexico until recent times. With López Portillo (1976-1982), the disappearances continued, and attacks on urban guerrillas increased greatly (González Villarreal 2012). The number of people who suffered enforced disappearance for political reasons since the late 1960s ranges from 600 to more than 1,300.<sup>45</sup> As elsewhere and as usually happens with enforced disappearances, the exact number of people that have been disappeared cannot be established, due to the clandestinity

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<sup>43</sup> Castellanos offers a thorough description of these campaigns (Castellanos 2007).

<sup>44</sup> See Aguayo for a history of the DFS. See Osorio for the relationship between DFS members and illegal activities such as drug trafficking. See Ortiz's article on the use of photography as a tool for espionage and for extermination of the political opponents (Aguayo 2001; Osorio 2013, 213; Ortiz Rosas 2017).

<sup>45</sup> See note 7 in Chapter 1.

and secrecy of this crime, and also because this is usually an underreported crime. People sometimes do not know that they can report it or, even if they know they can, are afraid to do so because of the possible negative consequences.<sup>46</sup>

González outlines some of the general trends of enforced disappearances in Mexico since the 1960s as follows: 1) the majority of the disappearances took place in Guerrero, particularly in Atoyac de Álvarez (where Cabañas' guerrilla was established), 2) the disappearances were committed in the context of the fight against rural guerrillas, and the first people disappeared were members, relatives, acquaintances or simply neighbours of guerrillas, 3) starting in 1969, it became frequent from 1971, and systematic from 1974, but still mainly taking place in Guerrero, 4) from 1975, the practice expanded to the centre and northwest of the country, 5) since then, the priority was to dismantle the LC23S, and 6) the perpetrators of the disappearances changed, from the army to paramilitary groups working for the DFS.<sup>47</sup>

The disappeared from urban and rural areas were taken into military and police facilities, which were used as secret and illegal prisons. The Military Camp No.1, the DFS' headquarters in Mexico City and the Naval Base in Icacos, Guerrero are emblematic in this regard.<sup>48</sup> Disappearances were publicly denied and the whereabouts of the victims were systematically concealed to their relatives. As Vicente Ovalle points out, 'the exercise of state violence has been accompanied by its own denial' (Vicente Ovalle 2017).

To summarise, state violence was carried out in a planned and systematic way, which took two different forms in rural and urban areas responding to the characteristics of the guerrillas and of the agencies employed against them. In rural areas, guerrillas were repressed mainly by the military, using a territorial logic and paying special attention to the guerrilla's support base. Urban guerrillas were dealt with in a more selective way, defining the guerrilla groups that were to be captured through intelligence gathered by the DFS and the DGIPS (González Villarreal 2012).

In this context, the leftist tone of the Mexican government and its close relationship with the Cuban and the Chilean governments, whilst being an important ally of the United States, may seem contradictory. Echeverría was close to Fidel Castro at the same time that he repressed Castroite guerrillas in the country.<sup>49</sup> While torturing, killing and disappearing its citizens in the 1970s and 1980s, the federal government received Latin American political exiles, and tried to position itself at the

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<sup>46</sup> More on this will be analysed in chapter 5.

<sup>47</sup> For a historical account of enforced disappearances in Mexico, see González Villarreal 2012.

<sup>48</sup> For a list of clandestine detention centres see Castellanos (De los Ríos 2009; Castellanos 2007, 180). See Aviña for an account of the excavations carried out in 2008 at the Atoyac military base in search of remains of disappeared people (Aviña 2014).

<sup>49</sup> For more on the relationship Mexico-Cuba see: Aguayo 2001; Montemayor Romo de Vivar 2010; Padilla 2007; White 2007; Keller 2012; Grandin and Joseph 2010; Hodges and Gandy 2002; Covarrubias 2011; Covarrubias and Rojas 2011.

vanguard of the leftist Third World countries. The government presented itself as implementing moderate social changes to avoid a more radical change, but as I have shown here there was a clearly repressive side to this, which connects the Mexican case to the national security regimes of the Southern Cone. As in other cases in Latin America, the United States had the role of instigator and supporter of this repression, but the actual repression was carried out by the Mexican government. In following chapters I analyse the impact of this foreign policy and the uses different governments gave to it when addressing disappearances.

### 3.1.4 The Failed Transitional Justice

For decades and despite the constant work of human rights organisations, these crimes remained in the dark and in total impunity. In 2000, after 71 years in power, the PRI lost the federal election to the PAN, with Vicente Fox as their candidate. Since the presidential campaign, Fox had promised to end with impunity for the political crimes of the past if successful as a candidate. As part of his rhetoric of change, speaking about the end to impunity represented a clear break up between PAN and its predecessor PRI (Castellanos 2007; Trevino-Rangel 2012). With its accession to power, a series of measures that can be labelled as transitional justice initiatives were implemented. Among them, the three more important were the launch by CNDH of a report on disappearances in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s in 2001, the creation of FEMOSPP in 2001, and the opening of the intelligence archives in 2002. Even though these measures were important in documenting the systematic and planned nature of the state violence, and in making public and opening the debate on the issue of political violence of past decades, it has been argued that their results were limited due to a lack of political will since their inception.<sup>50</sup> Bilbija and Payne explain how perpetrators of human rights violations and also sometimes the governments that followed those that committed state violence follow a 'silence is golden' rule as silence 'incurs fewer costs and render greater potential profit than speaking out' (Bilbija and Payne 2011b, 17). In the Mexican case, the PRI governments that committed disappearances systematically denied their occurrence. As I show in this section, even though the Fox government engaged with dealing with the state violence committed in the past, the way in which this was dealt with favoured silence.

In 2001, the CNDH presented a report on disappearances to the president, which drew upon the results of a first report elaborated in the early 1990s.<sup>51</sup> This report accredited 275 cases of enforced disappearance out of 532 analysed cases (CNDH 2001). The methodology behind this report has

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<sup>50</sup> The CNDH, for example, explains how different groups were created within the state apparatus to deal with political opponents, illegally detaining them and taking them to illegal and clandestine prisons within state premises, and using torture as a systematic practice to obtain information. Another example of this systemacity is the 'Spiderweb Plan' (Plan Telaraña). This was a military plan aimed at 'the search, localisation, siege and neutralisation and capture of the criminals (maleantes), in order to re-establish the tranquillity on the critical areas of the state of Guerrero'. For more on this plan see: Oikión Solano 2007, 78.

<sup>51</sup> See more on the CNDH reports in Chapter 5.

been highly criticised as it mainly consisted in sending requests to governmental offices to find documents proving the government's involvement in disappearances. The names of the perpetrators were not included in the report, although they were given to President Fox during the report's launch event (Acosta and Ennelin 2006).

Following this event, the Fox administration announced the creation of a special prosecutor's office (FEMOSPP) to deal with these crimes. After four years of work, the results of FEMOSPP were very limited. In 2006, the prosecutor's office was dismantled, without achieving convictions for those responsible for the crimes (Acosta and Ennelin 2006; Trevino-Rangel 2012; Aguayo Quezada and Treviño Rangel 2007). As explained in chapter 2, Mexico signed the Inter American Convention during this period, lodging reservations that prevented justice for these crimes. Thus, while formally there was a commitment to human rights and to an end of impunity, the possibility to achieve justice was locked. As I show in chapter 5, this has been part of a trend of different Mexican governments that in discourse are committed to guaranteeing human rights, but whose policies fall short to achieve them.

In terms of the right to the truth, the report was never launched in public and cannot be accessed on official websites. An edited version of the final report elaborated by FEMOSPP was leaked to the National Security Archive in 2006, in which website it can be found (Doyle n.d.). As in the CNDH report, the names of the perpetrators were also omitted from this document. The UNWGEID recommended that Mexico should make FEMOSPP and CNDH's reports available to contribute to the right to the truth, including in them the names of the perpetrators (United Nations 2011).

As Karl affirms:

The Mexican case suggests that the global discourse of transitional justice was used only as part of a political rhetoric of change where empty phrases about democratization, human rights, truth, memory, and justice served to legitimize the new power holders. It became clear that the structural culture of impunity is a deep-seated local reality and that a de facto amnesty had already been granted to the perpetrators (Karl 2014a, 745).

For this author, this process aimed more at closing a debate than at opening it. In Castellanos' words 'the failure of the prosecutor's office meant a triumph of impunity' (Castellanos 2007, 323). Regardless of these shortcomings, both reports describe the systematic way in which opponents were followed, illegally detained and 'disappeared', which had been denied by presidents, Ministers of Interior and other state agents until then. Moreover, they show that no investigation to reveal the whereabouts of the disappeared was ever put in place. As I illustrate in following chapters, this period opened a debate on the disappearances of past decades that served as the background in which battles for memory took place.



In this context, intelligence archives deposited in Mexico's National Archive (Archivo General de la Nación, AGN), which document the ways in which state violence took place, were formally opened to the public as part of the period of transition in 2002. In a symbolically charged decision, the archive was deposited in the former Lecumberri prison, where many of the political prisoners were held during the PRI governments (Flaherty 2016, 44). Cards recording the surveillance and the strategies used against political opponents show the systematic and planned nature of the different strategies used against political opponents and specifically of the disappearances.<sup>52</sup> As with any intelligence document, what is available is only the part of the story that was meant to be recorded, even if only for internal use (Aguayo 2001; Castellanos 2007; Human Rights Watch 2006). Even though these documents were formally opened to the public, the Ministry of Interior has control over the archive and over what material researchers can actually access (Human Rights Watch 2006; Brendese 2009). As part of the battles around memory and history, since 2015 the federal government (PRI) has attempted to close the access to the archives, which has resulted in a public debate on the right to the truth (Vicente Ovalle, n.d.; Flaherty 2016).

Besides the measures taken by the federal government during the change of political power in 2000, the other measure that should be acknowledged is the creation by the Guerrero state parliament of the Guerrero State Truth Commission (Comisión de la Verdad del estado de Guerrero). This commission was established under the argument that other reports had not complied with the right to the truth, and that this was necessary in order to reach the consolidation of democracy in the state. According to its final report 'the lack of results in the investigations carried out regarding the violation of human rights in that time (1960s-1980s) keep on causing harm, impunity and ingobernability' (Navarrete Gorjón et al. 2014, 5). Their work consisted in revising AGN documents, performing fieldwork in Guerrero speaking to survivors and relatives of the disappeared, and carrying out exhumations to search for the disappeared, which resulted in finding two ex-guerrillas who were members of the Lucio Cabañas' group. Formed by members of civil society, its report is critical of the action of the government, highlighting the use of the military to eliminate the guerrilla groups.

According to the report, there are elements to argue that the National Ministry of Defense (Secretaría de la Defensa Nacional, SEDENA) has the information of the whereabouts of all those forcibly disappeared in the state, as there are official documents with information on those who according to those documents should be illegally detained and on the entry of those persons to military facilities. Moreover, the report qualifies the acts carried out during this period as generalised and systematic, therefore as a crime against humanity. It presents official DFS documents that establish SEDENA's clandestine actions to locate, capture or exterminate the guerrillas in this state. The report states that to achieve this objective 'the material and moral support from authorities at all levels is required' (Navarrete Gorjón et al. 2014, 31). The repression was, as shown by the report, a state policy. The report includes a section detailing the smear campaign against its commissioners, the life threats they

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<sup>52</sup> See Padilla and Walker for a series of articles on the AGN's documents (Padilla and Walker 2013).

suffered, the complications in terms of getting economic resources to perform their tasks, as well as the difficulties of accessing official documents. The final report was launched in Mid-October 2014, weeks after the enforced disappearance of the 43 Ayotzinapa students in September 2014. Even though this time coincidence could have boosted the public response to the report as it presented a historical context for comprehending the disappearance of the students, it did not receive large amounts of national or international attention. This can be explained as part of a general lack of comprehending the disappearance of the students in its broader context, which I analyse in chapter 7.

### 3.2 Disappearances from the mid-2000s Onwards

Having arrived into office with little credibility after a possible electoral fraud, Felipe Calderón used the military as the key element in what he called the 'War on Drugs' in order to get social approval, which created a human rights crisis. The violence associated with drug trafficking escalated between 2005 and 2006 'in an alarming way' (Anaya 2012, 122).<sup>53</sup> Calderón then made security one of his five priorities, including it in his National Development Plan, but failed to address how human rights were going to be protected (Anaya 2012; Presidencia de la República n.d.; Human Rights Watch 2011).

When Calderón decided to strengthen the fight on drugs, drug dealers were already fighting a battle mainly amongst each other for routes and *plazas*. With the Calderonista strategy they hardened the fight against state agencies and created alliances for protection with corrupt state officials at all levels of government. The violence that had already increased during 2005 and 2006 worsened with Calderón (Knight 2012; Koonings 2012; Osorio 2013; Kan 2012; Blog del Narco 2013). Cartel fragmentation following the capture of some kingpins by the government contributed to the increase in violence, as readjustments and battles within and between cartels took place. When the PRI returned to office in 2012 the situation of violence did not change. Peña Nieto's security strategy followed the same militarisation path undertaken by the PAN, and local positions are still contested.

#### 3.2.1 The Militarisation of Anti-Drugs Operations

The military has had a historical role in the fight against drug trafficking in Mexico.<sup>54</sup> One of the most important operations against drug trafficking before the 2000s was Operation Condor, a

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<sup>53</sup> For more on the reasons of the increase in drug-related violence in Mexico, see: Kan 2012; Koonings 2012; Serrano 2012; Chabat 2010; Knight 2012.

See Kan for a description of the main Mexican cartels and their history, and Enciso for the influence of the United States in the Mexican battles against drug trafficking in the 1970s (Kan 2012; Enciso 2009).

<sup>54</sup> For a brief history of military use in drug-related tasks, see López-González 2012.

For Isaac Campos, the true starting point of the 'War on Drugs' was in March, 1920, when Mexico's Department of Public Sanitation promulgated the 'Disposition on the Cultivation and Commerce of Products

counternarcotic strategy used by the Mexican government in the 1970s carried out by the DFS and the military, both of which performed counterinsurgency operations against guerrillas at the same time. Operation Condor consisted in the use of chemical defoliants to eliminate drug crops on a big scale. One of the aims of this campaign was, according to Craig, also to cooperate more intensively with the United States and other governments in the battle against drugs. This military operation was led by brigadier general José Hernández Toledo, the same general that commanded the Parachute Battalion involved in the Tlatelolco massacre (Osorio 2013; Craig 1980).<sup>55</sup>

Nonetheless, up until President Carlos Salinas' sexenio (1988-1994) the main agency in charge of the battle against drugs was the Attorney General's Office (Procuraduría General de la República, PGR). With Salinas, the army was given a greater role in the battle against drugs without civil supervision (López-González 2012). The role undertaken by the army used to be more related to destroying drug crops and to a lesser extent carrying out intelligence tasks (Chabat 2010), so the change was twofold. Firstly, the military and navy started to be more involved in intelligence tasks (Chabat 2010; Serrano 2012; Anaya 2012, 2013), and secondly, the number of military personnel involved in these tasks increased dramatically (Anaya 2013). The decision taken by Calderón followed a process of gradual involvement of the military in the fight on drugs. After Salinas opened the door to the army for more participation in intelligence tasks, Ernesto Zedillo (1994-2000) made the decision to put the armed forces at the forefront of the battle against drug traffickers. With Zedillo the role of the military in the battle against drugs became institutionalised under the assumption that military-educated personnel were less likely to become corrupt, and that their instruction would help the police by working in the same places. As Serrano shows, the military went from eradication to surveillance operations, increasing their exposure to drug corruption. The military was in charge of dealing with the Zapatistas, with criminal activity, and with the drug dealers, which implied a rapid growth of the military in the 1990s. (López-González 2012, 85; Serrano 2012). This trend increased with Vicente Fox (2000-2006) and even more with Felipe Calderón (2006-2012) and his declaration of a 'War on Drugs'.

Both Fox and Calderón were critical of the use of the military in the battle against drugs before becoming Presidents. During his campaign, Fox proposed to withdraw the military from the antidrug battle, but as President he continued the trend of increasing its participation. As part of this militarisation strategy and as has been shown by Chabat, Fox appointed an on-leave military general as Attorney General (a civilian job). According to López-González, by 2012, persons with military backgrounds occupied 16 out of 20 of the most important positions within PGR and Federal Public

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that Degenerate the Race', banning marijuana's cultivation and putting restrictions on opiates and cocaine (Campos 2012, 181).

<sup>55</sup> The same name was used in the same period for a different context. Operation Condor was the name given to a repressive coordination operation between countries of Latin America and the U.S.A. in which they shared information about 'subversive' people in order to eliminate them through illegal practices. McSherry has called this Operation Condor a clandestine Inter-American system (Calloni 2001; McSherry 1999).

Security Ministry (Secretaría de Seguridad Pública Federal) (Chabat 2010; López-González 2012, 88).

### 3.2.2 Disappearances and Other Human Rights Violations in the so-called 'War on Drugs'

The militarisation process and the more frontal fight with organised crime described above has led to serious human rights violations exacerbating what Human Rights Watch (HRW) has labelled 'a climate of violence, lawlessness, and fear in many parts of the country' (Human Rights Watch 2011, 5). The military involvement in counter-narcotic operations had caused human rights violations in the past and this scenario was worsened by Calderón's large scale strategy of deploying the military in various parts of the country.<sup>56</sup> The physical presence and activity of military personnel has been associated to human rights violations across the country (Piñeyro 2010; Moloeznik 2013, 183). The reports presented to the CNDH against the National Ministry of Defense (Secretaría de la Defensa Nacional, SEDENA) have increased dramatically after 2006 (López-González 2012; Serrano 2012; Landman 2012; Anaya 2013).

More than 150,000 persons have been killed, and more than 310,000 have been internally displaced since 2006 (Telesur 2015; Comisión Mexicana de Defensa y Promoción de Derechos Humanos 2017). In this context, the situation of enforced disappearances in Mexico is 'one of the worst crises of disappearances in the history of Latin America' (Human Rights Watch 2013a). According to the National Registry on Disappeared or Lost Persons, the number of persons reported as disappeared as to June 2018 is 37,435 (F. Martínez 2018).<sup>57</sup>

At the beginning of Calderón's *sexenio*, the federal government used the high numbers of people killed as an indicator of the strategy's success; the more violence and killings occurred, the better the strategy was working. This way of portraying the problem did not recognise human rights violations by public servants, but implied that violence was a criminal reaction to the government's attack on the drug cartels' interests (Reveles 2012a; Enciso 2010). After the crisis of human rights violations became public due to the struggle of human rights organisations and relatives of the victims, some governmental agencies included human rights discourse in their public relations narrative. Nonetheless, the overall security strategy and the human rights violations that this has brought about did not change (Anaya 2012).

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<sup>56</sup> The human rights violations committed by the military during counternarcotic operations were documented since the Mexican Operation Condor. Serrano describes how during the Zedillo administration the use of the military in counternarcotic operations was connected to human rights violations (Craig 1980; Ortiz Pinchetti 1981; Enciso 2010; Serrano 2012).

<sup>57</sup> See chapter 5 for the problems on the data obtained by this registry.

The Peña Nieto administration portrayed itself as structurally different from those of the PAN, having the President in the cover of *Time* magazine promoting his reforms (TIME 2014),<sup>58</sup> and changing the discourse from talking about violence and war to another discourse that covers up violence (Schedler 2015; Illades 2015), but did not change the strategy in terms of security. As I show in chapter 7, cases of grave human rights violations (Tlatlaya and Ayotzinapa) confronted this discourse and exposed a completely different reality of human rights violations and impunity. Schedler's insight on this is very illustrative. In Calderón's *sexenio*, a sort of emergency state was declared and the violence was interpreted as resulting from a war between different organised crime groups. The armed forces would then be deployed to protect society. 'The Peña Nieto government replaced the discourse of denial with the silence of denial'. Instead of accepting there was a problem, which the government was going to solve, the new administration preferred to minimise its importance using phrases 'like 'violence is worse in other countries', 'it has always existed', 'it only affects certain parts of the country's territory and it is decreasing''. (Schedler 2015, 15, 16), Peña Nieto's administration's strategy has been to be silent about violence whenever possible (Schedler 2015, 217).

### 3.2.3 Differences and Similarities of Disappearances over Time in Mexico

For comprehending the struggles and positions taken by the relatives of the disappeared over time in Mexico it is important to understand how disappearances have changed, for which I present differences in three interrelated aspects. First, who the agents committing the crime are. Second, what the motivations for the crimes are. And third, who the victims of the disappearances are. In terms of the agents of the crimes, as I have described in this chapter, disappearances in the first period were committed mainly by state agents, chiefly members of the political police, death squads, and the army. In the case of the disappearances from the mid-2000s, the lines between different groups committing disappearances can be blurrier. In many cases, it is clear that the perpetrators are agents of the state, which will then make them enforced disappearances under the international legislation. In other cases, disappearances are committed by military or police officers dressed in civilian clothes. Moreover, sometimes disappearances are carried out by private citizens who might be involved in organised crime.

As presented in chapter 2, both the Inter-American Convention on Forced Disappearance of Persons and the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance state that one of the characteristics of enforced disappearances is that they are 'perpetrated by agents of the state or by persons or groups of persons acting with the authorization, support, or acquiescence of the state' (Organization of American States n.d.; 'International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance' n.d.). Thus, what is at the centre of defining who is committing

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<sup>58</sup> This cover was highly criticised in Mexico and elsewhere when published, and was used in protests against Peña Nieto across the world. See: D. Hernández 2014; Moreno 2014.

the disappearances and if they are actually enforced disappearances, is the involvement of the state. Defining the amount of disappearances that can be considered enforced disappearances according to the international legislation is a process that can only be accomplished through proper investigations. Nonetheless, in the context of the so-called 'War on Drugs', the Mexican governments have consistently denied the involvement of state agents in disappearances and blamed organised crime for them, many times even before carrying out an investigation. According to AI, by doing this, governmental officials downplay 'the fact that many parts of the State, not just local police, are operating in concert with organized crime or commit human rights violations as part of their public security activities' (Amnesty International 2015, 9).

To prove the involvement of state agents in disappearances and thus the existence of enforced disappearances in this second period, AI, HRW, and national organisations have documented cases of the involvement of public servants who sometimes commit the crime on their own and sometimes in collaboration with others. In 2011, HRW had documented 39 cases in an investigation made only in 5 states. By 2013, HRW had documented 149 cases in 5 states. AI reported 85 'emblematic cases' in 2013, and reported that the CNDH is examining 2,400 cases of enforced disappearance. The Mexican Commission of Defense and Promotion of Human Rights (Comisión Mexicana de Defensa y Promoción de los Derechos Humanos, CMDPDH) states that 390 reports for enforced disappearances were presented to the CNDH between December 2006 and December 2011 (Human Rights Watch 2011, 125, 2013b; Amnesty International 2013; Comisión Mexicana de Defensa y Promoción de los Derechos Humanos 2013). These cases are just a small sample of the total number of disappearances, which will only be known after a big governmental investigative effort is made.

In this same regard, two recent investigations shed light on the ways enforced disappearances have been committed in this second period by a combination of state agents, and state agents in conjunction with members of organised crime. The first document is a report launched by the International Federation of Human Rights (Federación Internacional de Derechos Humanos, FIDH) and other organisations such as the Fray Juan de Larios Human Rights Centre (FJdL), which was handed to the International Criminal Court asking for a preliminary evaluation on Mexico based on crimes committed in Coahuila (2009-2016). This report explains the systematic way in which police officers were responsible of detaining persons who were later disappeared by 'Los Zetas' criminal organisation. The report shows the close work between organised crime and different local government's agencies, and is the result of the analysis of testimonies of ex *Zetas* and victims produced during several trials for money laundering in Texas (The Human Rights Clinic. The University of Texas School of Law and Centro Diocesano para los Derechos Humanos Fray Juan de Larios 2017; Redacción AN 2017a). The second is a court case developing in the state of Veracruz since early 2018, which traces the systematic manner in which state police officers illegally detained and then disappeared young people in Veracruz, accusing them of having links with the Zetas. This case has highlighted the involvement of different levels of the state police structure in these crimes,

including high ranking officers at the public security secretariat of Veracruz (León Carmona 2018; Jacobo García 2018).

There are, then, cases in which the direct implication of the state can be demonstrated. But in many other cases, either the state is not involved, or the authorisation, support, or acquiescence of state officers cannot be proven. In a context of tens of thousands of people disappeared in ten years and of a generalised impunity, organisations like FUNDENL argue that all disappearances can be considered enforced disappearances, as the state, knowing that these can and do take place, is not taking the adequate measures to prevent this from happening, and to investigate and punish disappearances, which could be considered acquiescence. Robledo maintains that disappearances in Mexico are ‘a systemic crime that involves both the involvement by direct action, authorisation or acquiescence of state agents (...) and the lack of investigation and action to search for the disappeared, the reiterated criminalisation of the victims, the denial to acknowledge the problem and the failure in systems that are essential for the search, such as the forensic and the national registry of disappeared persons which, as has been denounced, derives in ‘disappearing the disappeared’ (Robledo Silvestre 2016, 104).

As explained in chapter 2, the fact that some disappearances in this second period are carried out without the involvement of the state has meant that part of the work of the relatives of the disappeared of the second period has focused on lobbying for the inclusion at the national level of this other form of disappearances that does not correspond to the prototypical definition included in the international conventions. According to Robledo, the complexity of disappearances can be used by state actors as a way to dilute the state’s responsibilities (Robledo Silvestre 2015a). By creating this new figure that corresponds to a different reality, the relatives of the disappeared and human rights organisations aim at clarifying the responsibilities of the state in both crimes.

For this, it is central to understand that many state agents and agencies interact in this crime. In terms of the commission of enforced disappearances, different levels of police officers, military and navy officials, public prosecutors (MPs), prison workers, members of death squads, and migration officers may be involved. Paramilitary groups, death squads, and different groups working indirectly for the state can also be responsible for the commission of the crime. Authorities at every level of municipal, state and federal governments might be involved too in terms of the support, authorisation or acquiescence of these crimes.

With regards to the further responsibilities of the state both after enforced disappearances and after disappearances committed by private citizens, several offices are implicated. Local prosecutors and police officers, as well as the navy and the military have the responsibility of searching for the disappeared. Personnel at Forensic Medical Services (Servicio Médico Forense, SEMEFO) and forensic teams are responsible for recovering, identifying and preserving bodies if the disappeared person is dead. The responsibility of carrying out reparations in a broad aspect relies on the Executive

Commission for the Attention of Victims (Comisión Ejecutiva de Atención a Víctimas, CEAV). The provision of justice relies on judges, MPs, and prosecutors at different levels. The responsibility of guaranteeing the non-repetition of the crimes relies on the judicial branch as well as the Executive and Legislative branches. The creation of a legal framework that prevents disappearances is the responsibility of the entire Legislative branch, as well as of the Executive branch. Besides those entities in charge of pursuing justice, state entities such as local and national human rights commissions play an important part in terms of the responsibility with the right to the truth.

This complexity in terms of responsibilities marks how the relatives of the disappeared interact with the government and the demands they make as I analyse in following chapters. The organisations working from the 1970s onwards against disappearances, who identified the state as the actor committing the disappearances, asked the governments to stop committing disappearances and to set the disappeared free. Recently, and even though the relatives of the disappeared can count on different legal documents that the relatives of the disappeared decades ago did not have, the task has not become any easier. As the role of state actors is not clear in many cases, its responsibility and the course of action may be uncertain. As Robledo points out, to call on the government's responsibility is 'an ever more complex task in the labyrinth of shadows imposed by this context of violence' (Robledo Silvestre 2015a, 99). Nonetheless, as I discuss in chapter 4, many of the organisations working against disappearances of the second period interact with many of the aforementioned state agencies demanding that they comply with their responsibilities. Besides this, some organisations are actually performing part of the tasks that these agencies should take on, particularly in terms of developing a legal framework and of the investigation, search, and genetic identification of the disappeared.

In terms of the motivations of the crimes, there is also a difference between the disappearances of the first and second periods. In the 1960s-1980s in Mexico as well as in different countries of Latin America the disappearances had a predominantly political motivation. In the second period there are also enforced disappearances for political reasons, mainly committed against activists, land, water, and human rights defenders and journalists. However, there are other disappearances that do not correspond to this pattern, and for which there are several hypotheses, including: (i) the disappeared have specific technical skills (disappearances of architects, doctors, engineers, builders, telecommunication officers, amongst others);<sup>59</sup> (ii) have physical strength, (allegedly for their use as forced workforce in the organised crime structure); (iii) the disappeared are used for organ and human trafficking; and (iv) the disappeared are punished for not cooperating with drug cartels (Turati 2016; Amnesty International 2013). In many cases several factors may be at play. There is also a more general hypothesis of the use of disappearances by a mix of state and non-state actors to terrorise communities in order to control them, get access to their land, and exploit their natural resources (Mastrogiovanni 2014; Eraña and Rojas 2015). Mbembé's explanation of how populations are immobilized for the extraction of natural resources is useful to understand these claims (Mbembé

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<sup>59</sup> A 2012 article narrates the stories of how these persons could have been forced to set up a sophisticated infrastructure for the organised crime (P. Martínez 2012).



2003, 34). Additionally, the differentiation proposed by Koonings between old and new violence is also helpful. For him, the old violence of the 1950s-1980s was mainly political and the new violence has been characterised more as economic and social (Koonings 2012, 225).

The differences in the motivation of the disappearances imply a difference in who are the victims of these crimes. Whilst in the late 1960s, 1970s and 1980s the victims were mainly people related to social movements, protests or guerrillas and the disappearances were carried out by members of the state or with its consent, in the context of the disappearances of the second period, the targets of disappearances are not so clear. For AI, in the current context anyone could be a victim of enforced disappearance. As I have argued before, enforced disappearances for political reasons still occur in the country, but the trend seems to be that this crime is being used mainly against the general population (Amnesty International 2013). From what has been documented, the majority of the victims are boys and men between 17 and 50 years of age, but victims also include young and adult women and children (both boys and girls) (Amnesty International 2013, 5). According to Robledo: 'those who are absent today are not those persecuted by the government from thirty years ago, they are not the political enemy, the social leader, the dissident student; they are now subjects without title, without name, without identity' (Robledo Silvestre 2012, 80). The Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances agrees in terms of the lack of a particular profile of the disappeared, but defines the vulnerable groups as: women, journalists, human rights defenders, and migrants. The CMDPDH adds to these vulnerable groups, the people with social or political militancy, and people living in places where the violence has increased in the last years (Amnesty International 2013; United Nations 2011; Comisión Mexicana de Defensa y Promoción de los Derechos Humanos 2013).

Despite the differences between the two periods explained above, impunity should be mentioned as a factor of continuity, and as a reason why disappearances are still committed. The disappearances committed in the past remain unaddressed and unsolved, subject to total impunity, which 'continues to send a clear message to today's perpetrators of disappearances – whether they are state agents or criminal gangs – that disappearance is a crime without repercussions for the perpetrator' (Amnesty International 2013, 4). The impunity in disappearances in general is almost absolute; according to the government only 13 persons have been convicted for this crime, and the first soldier to be convicted for this crime was so in August 2015. Nonetheless, as the Open Society Justice Initiative explains: 'Without greater government transparency, it is not clear whether these government claims and responses are internally consistent or accurate' (Open Society Justice Initiative 2016a, 156).

Every human rights body and organisation at the national and international level has highlighted the impunity rates in Mexico regarding human rights violations and enforced disappearances in particular. Impunity means not only the lack of punishment, but it is in itself a violation of human rights that favours the reoccurrence of the crimes (Lessa and Druliolle 2011; Human Rights Watch 2013b). As the UNWGEID puts it:

The chronic pattern of impunity still exists in cases of enforced disappearance and sufficient efforts are not being made to determine the fate or whereabouts of persons who have disappeared, to punish those responsible and to guarantee the right to the truth and reparation. It would seem that Mexico is unwilling or unable to conduct effective investigations into cases of enforced disappearance (United Nations 2011, 16).

A particular factor that needs to be emphasised is the role of the army in committing enforced disappearances and the almost complete impunity it has enjoyed. As I have illustrated above, the army has consistently committed disappearances in Mexico. It had a central role in the disappearances in rural areas particularly in Guerrero in the 1970s, and has been linked to disappearances committed in the context of the so-called 'War on Drugs' across the country. National and international human rights actors have called for the accountability of these crimes, and for the troops' return to their barracks (The Associated Press 2015; OAS 2016a; Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances 2015; FUNDAR 2017). Nonetheless, instead of following this recommendation, the Congress approved the Law of Internal Security, legalising the army's policing operations across the country in late 2017 (WOLA 2017; Linthicum 2017).<sup>60</sup>

As I have stated above, enforced disappearances are not an isolated human rights violation and have not only occurred in the two periods described above. Usually disappearances occur in the same context as arbitrary detentions, extrajudicial killings, forced displacement, and torture. Understanding how the local and federal governments act towards enforced disappearances and its relationship with the different actors is essential for comprehending how those actors behave in a broader sense in relation to human rights violations.

### **3.3 The Social Will to Remember**

Throughout this thesis I analyse the battles for memory around the disappeared focusing mainly on the actions and discourses of the relatives of the disappeared and human rights organisations and the relationships with those of state actors. Nonetheless, an important factor in these battles is the role of the broader society and its (dis)engagement with memory politics and policies. In this section I argue that there is generally a low social will to remember, understanding this as the degree of engagement of the broader population with the politics of memory and with policies towards the disappeared. Contrary to the case of emblematic countries in terms of political violence and memory politics like Argentina and Chile, in Mexico, but for a few exceptions, there have not been massive demonstrations against disappearances, or to demand truth and justice for the cases; the topics of political violence and disappearances are not a main issue in the public debate. The memories of the

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<sup>60</sup> See chapter 7 for the role of the army in the Ayotzinapa case, and for the lack of accountability in this case.

disappeared do not occupy a prominent place in Mexico. An in-depth understanding of these differences would require more research. Nonetheless, for the purposes of this dissertation I provide a few ideas of factors that might help understand this low social will to remember found in Mexico.

The first factor is the characterisation of the victims and the implications this has in terms of identification and mobilising across different sectors. In the first period, the majority of the disappeared were poor rural young men, mainly from Guerrero. The rest were lower middle class or lower class young women and men who lived in urban areas, dispersed across many cities, making it difficult for a social movement to articulate around their disappearance. As I show in detail in chapter 5, there are no statistics of the disappeared of the second period. This, along with how the victims are portrayed is likely to be a factor for a low wider mobilisation around the disappearances. The government and the media generally portrayed the disappeared as common criminals in the first period, and as persons linked to organised crime in the second period.<sup>61</sup> I would argue that the lack of identification with a rural and poor victim, usually depicted as being guilty of its destiny is one of the reasons why there is a lack of involvement in terms of memory politics and policies. This is similar to what the President of the Truth and Reconciliation of Peru affirmed in 2003: 'Peru is 'a country where exclusion is so absolute that tens of thousands of citizens can disappear without anyone in integrated society, in the society of the non-excluded, noticing a thing' (Drinot 2009b, 15–16).

It is important to mention that mainly during the 1980s there was a social movement supporting the relatives of disappeared, accompanying their demonstrations, and giving them space in their own mobilisations. Nonetheless, this was a sectorised support, which for different reasons did not last through the decades. Moreover, as I analyse in this dissertation, two events that sparked a wider social involvement in the battles for memory were the creation of the MPJyD in 2011 with poet Javier Sicilia as a key figure, and the enforced disappearance of 43 Ayotzinapa students in 2014. In both periods, a wider sector of the population decided to intervene in the social debate, first on the so-called 'War on Drugs' and its victims, and later on the discourse around the disappearance of the students and on their fate. This is likely to have been the result of a wider identification with those representing the movement, in the case of the MPJyD, and of the victims in the case of the Ayotzinapa students, as I analyse in chapter 7. Besides the identification with the victims, both movements counted with a social network able to access the media and social media, publicly reverting the idea of what Butler has defined as 'ungrievable' victims (discussed in chapter 5) (Butler 2012; Brendese 2009).

A second factor that might intervene in the broader population's low involvement in the battles for memory around the disappeared in Mexico in comparison to other countries is the scale of the repression. This would be particularly true for the first period of disappearances. While in Argentina human rights organisations and relatives of the disappeared denounce more than 30,000 disappeared

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<sup>61</sup> See chapter 5 for more on this. See also Vicente Ovalle 2012, 2013.

persons during the last military dictatorship and in the years leading to it, the figures for people disappeared for political reasons in Mexico go from 600 to 1300. This impacts on the amount of people mobilising because of their direct relationship with disappeared people, but also on the general visibility these crimes might have. The second period of disappearances in Mexico, which has a similar figure of disappeared people that those of the Argentinian dictatorship should be compared with the years of the dictatorship. During the early years of the dictatorship, those mobilising for truth and justice were mainly relatives of the disappeared and human rights organisations working with them, as it has been the case in the last ten years in Mexico. The state of terror that prevailed in rural communities in Guerrero in the 1970s and still prevails in many cities throughout Mexico, may have prevented and prevent today people from getting into these actions, as this could mean their own disappearance or death. In a very different political context, this sensation of fear is similar to that of the dictatorships in the Southern Cone.

A third factor, which is essential to understand the differences in terms of the mobilisation of society is the context of the disappearances in both countries and the way in which these have been dealt with by different governments. I specifically refer here to the fact that many South American countries lived a military dictatorship or civil wars, whilst Mexico had a civil government in which elections were still carried out, and where individual guarantees were not suspended as they were in those other countries. At the end of the military dictatorships or civil wars, countries across the region created transitional justice measures to deal with the violent past: For example in Argentina the trials to the military juntas, the exhumation of mass graves, and the creation of the Argentine National Commission on Disappeared Persons (CONADEP), all of which were highly publicised. Argentina had a period of impunity and of 'silence' on the disappearances, but after the mid-1990s the memories of the repression have been in the centre of the public debate again (Franco 2005; Lessa 2013). As I argue in this thesis, the Mexican case has been radically different, as federal governments have silenced and minimised the memories of the political violence of the 1960s onwards. The transitional justice measures were probably not designed to create a public engagement with these topics. In the same way, disappearances of the mid-2000s onwards are usually minimised or blamed on organised crime, portraying them as a problem among private citizens. All of this, along with a compliant media have impacted on the accessibility broader society can have to non-official memories (Karl 2014b).

To sum up, the identities of the victims and the ways in which the victims have been portrayed, the extent of the issue, as well as the political system in which disappearances have taken place have all played a role in the low involvement of the wider civil society on the battles for memory. As I show in following chapters, part of the actions of the relatives of the disappeared have been focused on increasing social involvement in these battles.

As I have presented throughout this chapter, the different contexts in which disappearances have taken place have marked the particularities and differences of the two main periods of disappearances in Mexico. Understanding the similarities and differences in terms of the perpetrators

and of the victims, as well as the line of impunity between the two periods and what I call the low social will to remember is key to analyse the actions and strategies of the organisations working against disappearances in Mexico, which I will do in the next chapter. In the 'life after the tsunami' that disappearances represent (Gatti 2014), organisations have been created to fight for the return of the disappeared. The contexts in which disappearances have been carried out and the particularities of these have marked the actions of the relatives of the disappeared, as I show in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 4 SEVEN CASES OF ORGANISATIONS WORKING AGAINST DISAPPEARANCES IN MEXICO

During the two periods of disappearances relatives of the disappeared have gotten together to work in a collective way to search for their relatives. To understand the battles for memory around the disappeared it is important to examine how these organisations have operated, their strategies and the way in which they have worked with other groups to carry out their actions. This section analyses seven organisations of relatives of the disappeared and human rights organisations that accompany them. As I argue in chapter 1, I followed a critical ethnography approach for this thesis, which places the protagonists at the centre of the analysis highlighting the subjects' voices and their own power of transformation (Thomas 1993). Many of the collectives have gained more public attention in the last years, but there is still a gap in terms of their analysis in the academia. Because of this, besides examining the organisations' actions and ways of relating with the government, I present a brief history of each one of them.

The groups working against disappearances in Mexico are undergoing change, and the relationship between groups is also rapidly changing. In 2012 when the project for this thesis started there were around 20 human rights NGOs and groups formed by the relatives of the disappeared. Six years later, there are more than 50 well-defined groups plus those that are constantly being created in different parts of the country.<sup>62</sup> Along with all the relatives that are organised in groups, there are probably thousands of relatives who are not coordinated in groups to find their loved ones, but who do search for them on their own. Within this universe, I have selected seven organisations (three from the first period and four from the second period) in order to analyse their different discourses and ways of working. These cases show different ways of organising, relating with the government, and generally searching for the disappeared. The interviews done during fieldwork were carried out with people who participate in these groups and their testimony will inform the analysis of the thesis. However, as they are part of a bigger context much of my data in other chapters is also related to other organisations.

The topics that will be analysed in this chapter and that informed the decision of what organisations to work with, are: 1) relationship with other groups (if the organisations do or do not have ties with other 'supporting' organisations or entities -e.g. other human rights organisations, religious entities, etc.-, and how they are placed alongside other organisations of relatives of the disappeared); 2) actions taken against disappearances (whether their actions are more symbolic, focused on public policy or 'on the ground', searching for the disappeared themselves); 3) relationship with the government (if this is confrontational, cooperative or a combination of both); 4) the scope of their work: if they work with national or local cases. And 5) its membership, if they are formed by relatives of the disappeared

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<sup>62</sup> See Appendix 2 for a list of organisations working against disappearances in Mexico.

only or by relatives and people in solidarity. The fourth and fifth aspect are developed across the other three.

The organisations selected for analysis are: the *Comité Eureka* and the *Comité de Madres con Hijos Desaparecidos de Chihuahua* from the 1970s. *Ciudadanos en Apoyo a los Derechos Humanos A.C.* (CADHAC), *Centro de Derechos Humanos de las Mujeres* (CEDEHM), *Fuerzas Unidas por Nuestros Desaparecidos en Coahuila-México* (FUUNDEC-FUNDEM), and *Fuerzas Unidas por Nuestros Desaparecidos en Nuevo León* (FUNDENL) who work with cases from the 2000s. Finally, one more case of an organisation working with cases from the late 1960s onwards, but created during the 2000s, was selected: *Hijos por la Identidad y la Justicia contra el Olvido y el Silencio* (H.I.J.O.S. México). The way in which these organisations fit in the selection criteria is presented in section 1.4.

In this chapter I advance the argument that the differences in terms of disappearances and in the context between the two periods of disappearances have marked the actions carried out by the relatives of the disappeared and their relationship with the government. The relatives of the first period demanded to the government the return alive of their loved ones. In this endeavour they created connections with different sectors to foster their struggle. Meanwhile, the government publicly denied the existence of the disappeared in Mexico and, at the same time, welcomed political exiles from other countries in order to underpin the regime's democratic image. The relatives of the disappeared of the first period had to deal with a new crime, working along organisations, unions, and parties, and framing the disappearances in a relatively new discourse of human rights (Saltalamacchia 2009).

The relatives of the disappeared of the second period found a different national and international context when confronted with the disappearance of their loved ones: there are many local and international human rights organisations working in Mexico, and there is also a legal and institutional framework that they can resort to in their struggle. The complexities of the crime and of a context where organised crime and state officials are entangled impact on the relationship the relatives have with the state. While in the first period the relationship is more confrontational, in the second period this relationship presents a combination of confrontation and cooperation. Along with this, the scale of the problem is another important difference between the two periods. While in the first period organisations report between 600 and 1,300 disappeared people, in the second period the official numbers surpass the 37,000 disappeared persons and the number is rapidly growing (F. Martínez 2018).

## 4.1 A Brief History of the Organisations

### 4.1.1 Eureka Committee

In 1977, relatives of political prisoners met with Rosario Ibarra de Piedra, whose son Jesús Piedra Ibarra had been disappeared in 1975, and created Monterrey's Committee for the Defense of Political Prisoners, Persecuted, Disappeared and Exiled (Comité pro Defensa de Presos, Perseguidos, Desaparecidos y Exiliados Políticos de Monterrey) (Castellanos 2007, 284). While searching for her son, Ibarra met other relatives, mainly mothers, some already organised and some not, looking for their loved ones. With them, she created a national committee: the National Committee for the Defense of Political Prisoners, Persecuted, Disappeared and Exiles of Mexico (Comité Nacional pro Defensa de Presos, Perseguidos, Desaparecidos y Exiliados Políticos de México), founded in Monterrey in August 1977. The committee gathered relatives from Mexico City, State of Mexico, Oaxaca, Guerrero, Sinaloa, Chihuahua, Jalisco, San Luis Potosí, and Puebla (Maier 2001; Castellanos 2007). Other relatives of disappeared, killed, imprisoned, and exiled people knew about the committee through the press or informal communication channels (i.e. local priests) (Maier 2001). Following the publication of the creation of this committee in *Proceso* magazine, Ibarra received letters from all over the country of relatives of people who had been being killed, persecuted and disappeared by the government (Castellanos 2007; Chávez Hoyos 2015; Piedra Ibarra 2015; Argüello Cabrera 2010). After the formation of a parallel committee with a similar name, they changed the name to Comité pro Defensa de Presos, Perseguidos, Desaparecidos y Exiliados Políticos de México (Committee in Defense of Prisoners, Persecuted, Disappeared and Exiles for Political Reasons in Mexico) (Piedra Ibarra 2015; Hernández de Ramírez Duarte 2015a). In 1987, the *Doñas*, as the members of the committee are called, changed the name to Comité Eureka! which in Greek means 'I have found it' (Maier 2001; Hernández de Ramírez Duarte 2015a). Eureka worked with its members' personal funds, as well as with funds collected during their actions. As I show below, this constitutes a difference with more recent human rights organisations that receive private and public funds, allowing them to support the groups of relatives of the disappeared in different ways (Piedra Ibarra 2015; Chávez Hoyos 2015; Hernández de Ramírez Duarte 2015a). Only very recently Eureka created a legally registered organisation for financially administering the Indomitable Memory House Museum, a memory space for the stories of the disappeared from the 1970s and for the story of the Eureka Committee, located in Mexico City.<sup>63</sup>

Eureka is a collective formed mainly by relatives of the disappeared. Some of the people who were disappeared and later freed also integrated Eureka. Eureka was a national committee formed by groups in different parts of the country where relatives of people killed, imprisoned, exiled and disappeared had organised themselves to ask the government for justice for their loved ones and, in the case of the disappeared, to demand their liberation. They had six-months or annual national

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<sup>63</sup> I analyse this memory space in chapter 6.



meetings in which many *Doñas* from committees in other cities travelled to Mexico City, besides the times they travelled to Mexico City for other meetings and actions. The committees across the country also organised events on their own (Chávez Hoyos 2015).

In the last decade, Eureka has not been as active as it used to be. Many of its members have died and others are sick and old (Chávez Hoyos 2015). The vertical structure of the Committee with Rosario Ibarra as its leader resulted in a decrease of the Committee's work when, during her last periods as a Senator, Ibarra's work in Eureka decreased.<sup>64</sup> Now, some of the younger members of the committee (mainly sisters and wives of disappeared persons) participate in meetings, forums, and roundtables, talking about Eureka, their achievements, and the importance of their struggle.

#### 4.1.2 Committee of Mothers with Disappeared Children in Chihuahua

There is no written history of the Comité de Madres con Hijos Desaparecidos de Chihuahua. It is known that when a national committee was created in 1977 people from Chihuahua were part of it. Likewise, at the first hunger strike in 1978 organised by the Eureka Committee, one of the mothers from Chihuahua travelled to Mexico City and carried with her pictures of other people disappeared from that state, which speaks of a local coordination since then. The Committee was formed by women from different parts of Chihuahua, mainly Chihuahua City and Ciudad Juárez. It had a very active period by the end of the 1980s that can be analysed through articles in local newspapers. A key figure of the committee was Martha De los Ríos, whose sister Alicia had been disappeared in 1978. Along with her husband and other couples they worked very closely with the Comité de Madres. Together with the Christian Base Communities (CEBs) and this group, the Comité performed several actions.<sup>65</sup> Even if the Committee as such has not worked for years, mainly because the original members have passed away or are elderly, Alicia de los Ríos (Martha De los Ríos' niece) has continued with the work.<sup>66</sup>

#### 4.1.3 H.I.J.O.S. México

H.I.J.O.S. México is the Mexican section of the organisation founded in Argentina in 1995. When impunity was the rule, children of people disappeared in Argentina formed an organisation with three main topics: memory, identity and justice. They aimed at creating the basis for a legal condemnation, through a social condemnation of the crimes committed during the last dictatorship in Argentina (1976-1983). In Mexico, the organisation was founded in 2000. H.I.J.O.S. México is part of the

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<sup>64</sup> I present Ibarra's political history in the following section.

<sup>65</sup> For the role of the Catholic Church on human rights in Latin America, see: Kovic 2016.

<sup>66</sup> Alicia De los Ríos' story can be found in Aguayo's *La Charola*. A formal complaint on De los Ríos' case has been presented to the IAHR (Camacho Servín 2015; Centro PRODH 2011; Aguayo 2001; De los Ríos Merino 2015).

H.I.J.O.S.'s International Network integrated by organisations of Argentina, Chile, Colombia, France, Guatemala, Peru, Spain, and Uruguay. The organisations conform this network but work autonomously responding to local realities.

H.I.J.O.S. is a group of children of disappeared people, ex political prisoners, ex guerrillas, people assassinated for political reasons, and exiles, as well as people without a kin relation to someone affected by state violence but who want to be involved in the work of the organisation. H.I.J.O.S. vindicates the social and political struggles that took place in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. One of its characteristics is to work horizontally and to make decisions by consensus. H.I.J.O.S. is a political collective and it is not legally registered. H.I.J.O.S. treats those members who are not related to disappeared people as equal members. This sets a difference with other organisations (e.g. Eureka, FUUNDEC, AMORES) in which all the members are relatives of disappeared persons, or FUNDENL, in which there are people in solidarity within the group, but the decisions are mostly taken by the relatives.

#### **4.1.4 AMORES (CADHAC)**

CADHAC was created in 1992 and legally registered in 1993 in Guadalupe, Nuevo León, by its current Director Sister Consuelo Morales. The aim of the organisation was 'to defend and promote fundamental rights of men and women from an integral conception' (Ciudadanos en Apoyo a los Derechos Humanos n.d.). The organisation moved to Monterrey a few years after its creation. At the beginning it was a project of the CEBs, but it later added non-religious members interested in human rights. CADHAC has changed from being an organisation centred on the diffusion of human rights to being one dedicated to their active defence (Sánchez Reyna 2015).

CADHAC is an established human rights NGO with around 25 people working in it. Their work covers different areas: social work, legal assistance, education (which gives support to the relatives of the disappeared), communications and research, psychology, administration, projects and direction. CADHAC's work has shifted through the years, from nutrition campaigns in the early years to a more recent work on disappearances, torture, women, children, and penitentiary system in Nuevo León. CADHAC started working around disappearances in 2009, when relatives of the disappeared came to them. The Caravan of Solace's visit to Monterrey marked a turning point for this work, as it was after this that many relatives of disappeared people asked CADHAC for support. The different Caravans organised by the MPJyD served as a turning point in many parts of the country, where relatives of the victims saw the caravan as a safe space to share their stories. The Caravan had coverage in the media and for many relatives it was also the revelation of the scale of the problem (Gallagher 2013a). In 2011 more than 20 families started to meet at CADHAC's offices. In 2015, when fieldwork was carried out, around 45 families attended the meetings.

The first group of relatives of the disappeared that met at CADHAC from 2009 was LUPA (Struggle for Love, Truth and Justice; Lucha por Amor, Verdad y Justicia). In 2012, some members of the group left and founded FUNDENL. After that, the families working with CADHAC changed their name to AMORES (Agrupación de Mujeres Organizadas por los Ejecutados, Secuestrados y Desaparecidos de Nuevo León, Association of Women Organised for the Killed, Kidnapped and Disappeared from Nuevo León). AMORES, as many other organisations, is formed mainly by women, and has weekly meetings facilitated by CADHAC. AMORES is a structured organisation with a coordinator, secretary, and treasurer. As I show below, there are many ways in which groups of relatives of the disappeared are working with human rights organisations. In the case of CADHAC, the relatives have established a separate organisation, but their work and organisation still depends on CADHAC.

#### 4.1.5 CEDEHM

The Centre for Women's Human Rights (CEDEHM) was legally founded in 2007 as the result of the decades' work of human rights defenders in the state of Chihuahua. During the 1990s, the economic crisis brought a housing crisis in which thousands of families were not able to pay for their houses. In this context, El Barzón was founded in Chihuahua to help people facing evictions and debts to keep their land and their houses. 'El Barzón vindicates the right to housing, the earth, the water, the environment, versus GMO'. The Barzón was created in 1991 in Chihuahua and later extended to the whole country (PBI 2015a; Grammont 2001). They understood that the problem concerned families as a whole and women in particular, so they created Mujeres Barzonistas (Barzonista Women) from which they dealt with women's specific problems in this crisis, putting a gender focus to the problem (Gómez Caballero 2015).

When the femicides started in Ciudad Juárez, Mujeres Barzonistas joined the women's movement in Chihuahua. When these killings began to happen in Chihuahua City, they created Justicia para Nuestras Hijas (Justice for our Daughters), along with one of the mothers of a killed woman (Norma Ledezma, mother of Paloma Escobar Ledezma). This new organisation focused on these crimes. The founders of Mujeres Barzonistas and Justicia para Nuestras Hijas formed a new organisation to work in the prevention of sexual and domestic violence as 93% of the femicides had to do with domestic violence, many of which had been reported and received no answer from the authorities (Gómez Caballero 2015). Thus, CEDEHM was legally constituted to address domestic and sexual violence against women and children (Gómez Caballero 2015).

CEDEHM, based in Chihuahua, Chihuahua, is described as a non-governmental, feminist, non-partisan, human rights, non-religious, democratic organisation that promotes empowerment, organisation, education, and mobilisation of women to perform institutional changes through the attention, prevention and documentation of human rights violations (CEDEHM, PDH Ibero n.d.). CEDEHM is an established NGO that depends on international and private donations. CEDEHM does

not receive state funds (Gómez Caballero 2015). The organisation is divided in five areas that work horizontally. The key figures of the organisation come from the human rights movement of Chihuahua, having previously worked in El Barzón, in the women's movement, and in the armed struggle and solidarity groups of the 1970s (Front Line Defenders n.d.; La redacción 2012; Grammont 2001; PBI 2015a). Those experiences have marked the interventions and accompaniment they do with relatives of the disappeared. To provide services to victims of human rights violations does not equal to ensure them a comprehensive accompaniment. As I have explained in chapter 1, in the former, the victim gets access to certain services provided by professionals, many times focusing solely in that service. In contrast, a comprehensive accompaniment implies working *with* the victims, their families and communities to search for the guaranteeing of the variety of rights that have been violated. This perspective emphasises the psychosocial attention of the victims and their active role in the process.

The arrival to Chihuahua of federal security forces implied the increase in human rights violations from 2007. CEDEHM accompanies more than 100 cases of disappeared people, the majority from the municipality of Cuauhtémoc (Gómez Caballero 2015; Gómez Escárcega 2015; Fragoso Gutiérrez 2015; Muñoz González and Romo Salas 2015). The majority of the people that attend CEDEHM's activities are, as in other cases, women. The relatives accompanied by CEDEHM come together for workshops, activities, and demonstrations, but do not work as an independent group. The cases of CADHAC with AMORES and Fray Juan de Larios, Juan Gerardi, and Victoria Díez with FUUNDEC-FUNDEM are different because in those other experiences the relatives have created groups that have a certain independence from the human rights centres. Even if they are not constituted as a group, the relatives accompanied by CEDEHM I interviewed consider the group of relatives a safe space for peers and in which they are understood and not judged.

#### **4.1.6 FUUNDEC-FUNDEM**

United Forces for Our Disappeared in Coahuila (FUUNDEC) started as a group of families in Coahuila accompanied by the Centro Diocesano de Derechos Humanos Fray Juan de Larios (FJdL) and has now regional groups working in different parts of the country, reason why they have changed their name to FUUNDEC-FUNDEM. The Juan Gerardi Human Rights Centre and the Victoria Díez Human Rights Centre also help in the coordination and accompaniment of FUUNDEC-FUNDEM. The FJdL human rights centre was created in the city of Saltillo, Coahuila in 2002 by Bishop Raúl Vera, who has a long story in the defense of human rights. He was first assigned to Guerrero, where he founded a human rights centre attached to the diocese. In 1995, Vera was sent to San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas, to work with and allegedly to try to neutralise Samuel Ruiz García who was close to indigenous struggles and to the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional, EZLN). Since his arrival to Chiapas he became a member of Fray Bartolomé de las Casas Human Rights Centre's Directive Council. He was appointed bishop of the diocese of Saltillo in 2000 where he founded the human rights centre. The centre and he personally have

accompanied people facing human rights violations in the state, particularly the miners' families of the Pasta de Conchos incident and prior and following events. He has also helped in the foundation of two migrant shelters in Coahuila, and accompanied struggles at a nationwide scale (Diócesis de Saltillo n.d.; Mónaco Felipe n.d.).

At its creation, the centre worked mainly with community and workers' rights. When violence increased in Coahuila in the context of the so-called 'War on Drugs' the centre started receiving complaints of relatives of killed or disappeared people. Bishop Vera then invited Blanca Martínez, former director of the Fray Bartolomé de las Casas Human Rights Centre in Chiapas to lead the FJdL. Since Martínez's arrival in 2009, the accompaniment to relatives of disappeared persons has been non-stop. As in the case of CADHAC and CEDEHM, the previous experience in human rights defense has marked the approach FJdL has on the accompaniment to relatives. In December 2009, the group of relatives that had been working with the FJdL formed FUUNDEC. Other relatives in other places whose loved ones had been disappeared in Coahuila joined the group, adding Mexico to its name so it became FUUNDEC-FUNDEM (United Forces for Our Disappeared in Mexico).

Carmen Ramírez explains how they decided to use the name FUUNDEC: '(F)orces' as it is because of our strength, that strength that helps us move forward, even if we are not feeling well we pull out that strength to keep on walking and to keep on searching. (...) the more union there is the more force we have, it pushes us to search more (...) The forces of all of us united is what has helped us to keep on' (Ramírez Ortiz 2015). Villarreal argues that the decision to change the name was political and strategic. As the collective was in dialogue with national authorities, using the word Mexico helped them show that this was not a local issue to be dealt with only with local authorities (Villarreal Martínez 2016, 10).

Besides documenting human rights violations, Martínez wanted to help in the development of social subjects capable of fighting for their rights. In the first moment there were four cases, which together represented more than 20 disappeared persons. In December 2009 these families had the first meeting with local authorities and in December 2009 they made a public announcement. With the public demonstrations and some appearances in the media, more people joined the group. As in the case of Monterrey, after the Caravan of Solace more relatives approached FUUNDEC. Due to its limited capacity, the FJdL had to stop receiving cases which also meant that FUUNDEC-M stopped having new members (Verástegui González 2015; Ramírez Ortiz 2015).

FJdL receives only international funding. It accompanies the families of FUUNDEC-M with some funds for trips, but the organised relatives are in charge of collecting money for their activities, so there is not a dependent relationship between the relatives and the human rights centre (Verástegui González 2015). The families organised in FUUNDEC have also demanded the government to allocate some funds for certain activities. In 2015 when the interviews were carried out the FJdL had

seven members and was divided in direction, documentation area, legal area, legal defense area, and administrative area (Verástegui González 2015).

FUUNDEC-FUNDEM is formed mainly by relatives of the disappeared, and is organised in three regions: Centre (Mexico City, State of Mexico, Michoacán, Guanajuato, and Guerrero), Laguna (Torreón, Coahuila; Gómez Palacio, Durango; Chihuahua and Baja California) and South East (Saltillo, Monclova, Acuña, Piedras Negras, and Parras –all in Coahuila-, Reynosa, Tamaulipas and Sinaloa).<sup>67</sup> FUNDENL is also part of the South East region but they are organised as an autonomous collective. Each region has a coordination formed by three persons elected by the families. There are no leaderships in FUNDEM, but many times the persons giving interviews, appearing on the media, travelling to other states or abroad are the same as this depends mainly on their availability (Herrera del Llano 2015). The three regions are accompanied in different ways by three human rights centres. The Laguna region works closely with the Juan Gerardi Human Rights Centre in Torreón. The Centre region, particularly the families in León work with the Victoria Díez Human Rights Centre, and the South East region works with the FJdL, which also coordinates the three regions.

The Centro de Derechos Humanos Juan Gerardi was created in 1999 in Torreón, Coahuila. 'The organisation works in six areas: migrants, environmental defense (especially water), disappearances (collaborating with FUUNDEC), youth, communication and education/training'. This centre was founded by religious and non-religious people organised around the CEBs. Their two main lines of work are the promotion, education and culture of human rights, on the one hand, and the defense and denunciation on the other (Centro de Derechos Humanos Juan Gerardi A.C. n.d.).

The Victoria Díez Human Rights Centre was founded in 2001 in León, Guanajuato, with a focus on women's human rights. The centre is divided in three areas (education, organisational processes, and documentation and legal services) in which eleven persons worked as by 2015. Besides this the centre has a Direction and an administrative area. The organisation does not receive public funding. Their work on disappearances started in 2011 when relatives of the disappeared approached the centre. The centre offers moral, institutional and in some cases economic support for the relatives' struggle. They accompany 30 cases, all of them from people disappeared in other states such as Zacatecas, San Luis Potosí, Nuevo León, Tamaulipas, and Veracruz but whose families live in Guanajuato (López García 2015).

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<sup>67</sup> A new group called United Forces for Our Disappeared in Jalisco (Fuerzas Unidas por Nuestros Desaparecidos en Jalisco, FUNDEJ) was created in 2014. At the moment there is not a connection between them, and FUNDEJ does not form part of FUNDEM.

#### 4.1.7 FUNDENL

United Forces for Our Disappeared in Nuevo León is a group of relatives of disappeared persons and other people working against disappearances in Nuevo León. FUNDENL was created after a break up with CADHAC. In May 2012 FUNDENL (the name was inspired by FUUNDEC-FUNDEM) was created by around ten families (Hidalgo Rea 2015). Activists that supported CADHAC's work regarding disappearances decided to keep on accompanying the relatives organised in FUNDENL (González Ramírez 2015). As one of the differences with CADHAC was the hierarchical way in which decisions were made there, FUNDENL is organised horizontally (Hidalgo Rea 2015). FUNDENL is part of FUNDEM but holds a different kind of membership. They participate of FUUNDEC-FUNDEM's workshops, some of the hearings and events they organise, but they work as an autonomous group. FUNDEM has been one of the fundamental organisations in FUNDENL's process of becoming a solid organisation (Hidalgo Rea 2015). FUNDENL is an NGO under the figure of Civil Association (Asociación Civil, A.C.), which allows them to receive donations and participate in legal diligences more easily.

Contrary to other groups in which the relatives and non-relatives are clearly separated in terms of work and decision capacity, FUNDENL is defined as a collective of relatives and other people in solidarity (Castellanos López 2015). Nonetheless, the relatives have more say when making decisions. FUNDENL is formed by around 20 families of disappeared people and around ten other supportive members. Supportive members in Mexico and elsewhere have helped FUNDENL in organising solidarity campaigns and in gaining more visibility (Hidalgo Rea 2015). FUNDENL's interviewees emphasized the work made by relatives and non-relatives and the amplification of their reach thanks to the work of other groups.

The history of each one of these organisations is different and the way in which they came together and started working on disappearances will also mark some of the strategies they use. Eureka and the Comité de Madres con Hijos Desaparecidos en Chihuahua were organisations formed from scratch by relatives of the disappeared to search for their loved ones. H.I.J.O.S. was created by children of people affected by state sponsored terrorism with a strong link to Eureka and to H.I.J.O.S.'s international network. As human rights organisations, CADHAC, FJdL, and CEDEHM adapted the work they were already doing to accompany relatives of the disappeared when disappearances became common in Nuevo León, Coahuila, and Chihuahua, respectively after the declaration of the 'War on Drugs'. In terms of the organisation, the groups working with CADHAC (AMORES) and FJdL (FUUNDEC-FUNDEM) adopted a name and work alongside the human rights centre, whilst the relatives accompanied by CEDEHM are not organised as a different group.

## 4.2 Continuities and Ruptures in the Search for the Disappeared in Mexico

This second part of the chapter analyses the continuities and ruptures in the organisations' relationship with other groups, their actions against disappearances, and their relationship with the government.

### 4.2.1 Relationship with Other Groups

a) First period: Eureka Committee, the Committee of Mothers with Disappeared Children of Chihuahua and H.I.J.O.S. México

The actions carried out by Eureka and by the Committee of Mothers with Disappeared Children of Chihuahua, as those of the relatives of the disappeared elsewhere in Latin America, are considered some of the first steps in the construction of the human rights movement in the country (Isunza Vera 2001, 186; Maier 2001, 44; Tello Peón 1998, 297; Durand Ponte 1994, 307). Both committees were mostly formed by relatives of the disappeared, but other people supported them in their struggle. The Chihuahua Committee had a strong relationship with people from the CEBs and Eureka had a *Political Council* formed by people who were part of the social movements and with whom they would share their ideas and strategies. For Eureka, the first strategy in terms of organising was the way in which they structured their committee as a national organisation formed by local committees.

At the national level, another important step in terms of organising was the creation of the National Front against Repression (FNCR) in 1979. Formed by more than 60 organisations, FNCR served not only as a platform to advance Eureka's struggle, but also as a space for organising among different groups. After being inactive for many years, FNCR was re-established in 2007 in the context of growing militarisation and human rights violations, but it did not have the public impact that it had in the 1970s (M. de la L. González 2007). At the international level, Eureka participated in the foundation of FEDEFAM, which served as an important forum for the coordination of the organisations of relatives of the disappeared at the regional level, especially in the 1980s. Countries with organisations members of FEDEFAM include: Argentina, Bolivia, Brasil, Colombia, Chile, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Peru, and Uruguay ('Historia AFADEM | AFADEM-FEDEFAM' n.d.). As I show in Chapter 2, FEDEFAM was a key actor in the elaboration of a legal framework for enforced disappearances.

One of the most important strengths of Eureka, and of its leader Rosario Ibarra, was the creation of a national and international support network. For this, the Committee's relationship with organisations such as AI was essential. Eureka and AI's Mexican section were some of the first organisations to use the human rights discourse in Mexico (Rodríguez Castañeda 2013; Amnesty International 1997; Saltalamacchia 2009; Amnistía Internacional España n.d.). Besides the local work and the meetings



with government officials, Ibarra travelled abroad to raise awareness on disappearances in Mexico. She met with the UNCED and with the UNWGEID. There were committees in Europe that supported Eureka's struggle but this support decreased once the exiles returned to Mexico (Piedra Ibarra 2015). As I have shown in previous chapters, the Mexican government has historically dedicated much of its efforts to portraying an image of a democratic country that respects human rights. One of the strategies adopted by Eureka was that of shaming the government at the international level to put pressure on it. The contacts with international organisations such as AI, and the visits to the UN and other international bodies proved key. Besides this, the support received from some journalists and from priests from the Catholic Church was also important for the organisation (Chávez Hoyos 2015; Hernández de Ramírez Duarte 2015a; Piedra Ibarra 2015; 'Los Que Desaparecen En México, Jóvenes y Pobres' 1980; Poniatowska 1980; Maier 2001). The alliance with leftist political parties gave the committee big exposure, as it allowed Ibarra to be candidate to presidency in two occasions and congresswoman and senator in two and one occasions, respectively. In 1982 she was the first woman to be candidate to the Presidency in Mexico (Esparza and De Ycaza 2016).



*Figure 1 Rosario Ibarra shows solidarity letters after a campaign organised in conjunction with AI (Amnistía Internacional España n.d.).*

The relationship with the EZLN was also relevant for Eureka and for the Committee of Chihuahua. The members of Eureka always embraced the involvement of their loved ones in guerrilla movements or social organisations. Thus, a revolutionary uprising in Chiapas meant for them the continuity of the struggles of their relatives, which created a close relationship between Eureka and the EZLN. For Rosario Ibarra, Marcos -the icon of the EZLN in the early stages- was at the same time the symbol of all the disappeared people (La redacción 1995). Eureka mobilised their political resources to support

the EZLN and the EZLN always acknowledged the importance of Eureka and of the disappeared. The members of Eureka were seen as symbolic mothers of the EZLN. In 2009, after the death of 'Mamá Corral' (Doña Concepción García de Corral, from Chihuahua) the EZLN organised an event on Women's Day to commemorate her struggle and the *Doñas'* struggle (Bellinghausen 2009).

At the local level, the work of the Committee of Mothers with Disappeared Children of Chihuahua also played an important role in developing the human rights movement in that state (De los Ríos Merino 2015). They took part in some of the El Barzón's mobilisations in its beginning and joined the campaign Torture Never Again in Chihuahua, which evolved to create the Civil Association Commission on Solidarity and Defense of Human Rights (Comisión de Solidaridad y Defensa de los Derechos Humanos A.C., COSYDDHAC), the first human rights organisation in Chihuahua (De los Ríos Merino 2015; COSYDDHAC n.d.). The human rights movement that Eureka and its local committees helped develop has been fundamental in accompanying the new organisations of relatives of the disappeared.

#### *H.I.J.O.S. México*

H.I.J.O.S. has worked as a pivotal collective between the organisations of relatives of the disappeared of the first and second periods. Being part of a second generation of relatives of the disappeared they consider Eureka's struggle their predecessor. At the same time they articulate actions with the newer organisations of relatives of the disappeared bringing this history with them. The link with Eureka is political, but also based on family ties as some of the members of H.I.J.O.S. are children or grandchildren of members of Eureka. Being a newer organisation formed by young people, they kept some of Eureka's contacts while they also created a network of their own.

Two networks have been especially important to H.I.J.O.S.: H.I.J.O.S.'s international network and the Zapatista movement. The influence of H.I.J.O.S.'s network is strong in terms of the actions carried out by the Mexican collective, in the collective's way of organising, and in their discourse in terms of social justice and condemnation, and of working for society to understand that disappearances are a social and not a private issue. Regarding the Zapatista movement, H.I.J.O.S. actively participated in the Otra Campaña, an effort in organising 'from below and to the left' since 2005 (Mora 2007). The contact with organisations and collectives that participated in this campaign has continued through the years and H.I.J.O.S. has also participated in regular encounters organised by the Zapatista movement.

Since 2011, H.I.J.O.S. has participated in encounters facilitated by SERAPAZ (Servicios y Asesoría para la Paz, Services and Advice for Peace) in which the contact with newer organisations developed greatly. It was a complicated collective process to understand the connections of the two periods of disappearances, but the relationship with the organisations gradually strengthened.<sup>68</sup> H.I.J.O.S. has

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<sup>68</sup> See more on this in Chapter 5.

participated in encounters with these organisations, organised events together (i.e. Mother's Day marches and Day of the Disappeared's events) and shared their skills with them.

b) Second Period: CEDEHM, CADHAC, FUUNDEC-M, FUNDENL

The organisations of the second period analysed in this thesis have different ties with national and international organisations. As I show below, the contact with professional human rights organisations, many of them formed by people involved in the social struggle in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s has had a great impact in the ways in which the groups of relatives of the disappeared work. To introduce these different networks I have divided the analysis in four levels: i) relationship with accompanying organisations, ii) relationship with other organisations of relatives, iii) relationships with national organisations and groups, and iv) relationships with international organisations.

The first level of relationships, which is shared by the four cases I have selected from the second period of disappearances, is the accompaniment by human rights organisations. The militarisation that followed President Calderón's decision to fight organised crime brought with it an increase in violence and in human rights violations in several parts of the country. As presented in chapter 3, this is a complex context in which organised crime, the public security forces, and sometimes a combination of both have committed kidnappings, disappearances, killings, torture, extortions, etc. in almost total impunity. In this context, relatives of disappeared people approached CEDEHM in Chihuahua; Fray Juan de Larios and Juan Gerardi Human Rights Centres in Coahuila; CADHAC in Nuevo León and Victoria Díez Human Rights Centre in León, among many other organisations across the country. These organisations that already counted with an expertise in human rights adapted their work to provide specific accompaniment in cases of disappearances (Gómez Escárcega 2015; Gómez Caballero 2015; Sánchez Reyna 2015; López García 2015; B. Martínez 2015).

The panorama in terms of the new organisations of relatives of the disappeared has changed in terms of their numbers and distribution. The creation of a regional network including relatives from CADHAC, CEDEHM and FUUNDEC that still collaborates organising regional encounters and actions is an important step. Another significant moment referred by all the interviewees was the Solace Caravan organised by the MPJyD in 2011. This was a turning point in terms of the visibility of the victims: many relatives of disappeared persons who had not approached an organisation or reported the crime before did so at that point. CADHAC, CEDEHM and FUUNDEC hosted the Caravan in their respective states. After its foundation, FUNDENL has also joined the Movement for Peace with Justice and Dignity. The formalisation of a network of organisations working against disappearances occurred in March 2015 in the context of the lobbying for the creation of a general law against disappearances in Mexico. This network is comprised of more than 70 organisations working against disappearances, and includes collectives of relatives of the disappeared and human rights organisations. Around 40 of them are organisations of relatives, and the remaining are human rights

organisations working against disappearances (Movimiento por Nuestros Desaparecidos en México n.d.).

In a third level of relationships, the organisations of relatives have created alliances with organisations within the country that offer specific support. SERAPAZ, which organised meetings twice a year to discuss specific topics that contributed to the organising processes of the organisations of relatives of the disappeared (e.g. psychosocial support, forensics, search strategies) has played an important role in this regard. Other organisations in this category are the Miguel Agustín Pro Juárez Human Rights Centre and FUNDAR Analysis and Research Centre, both in Mexico City.

Besides these organisations, there are other collectives which provide support and organising as well and work in a more symbolic way. Bordados por la Paz (Embroideries for Peace) and Huellas de la Memoria (Footprints of Memory) initiatives, for example, work to enable the memorialisation and rehumanising of the disappeared. Through artistic initiatives using handkerchiefs and shoes, these collectives serve as vehicles of memory that bring the stories of the disappeared and of those looking for them to different spaces, like cultural centres and universities, in Mexico and in other countries. The Footprints of Memory project also serves as a way of giving visibility to the continuity of disappearances in the country, by including cases of the two periods (Cordero 2017; Lorusso 2016; Ortiz 2016; Bordados de Paz, Memoria y Justicia: Un Proceso de Visibilización, n.d.; 'Bordamos Por La Paz' n.d.; Montero n.d.; Rizzo 2015).

As in the previous period, the work of journalists has served the families to spread the word on the disappearances crisis. The publication of their stories has also made more people share their stories and join the groups. Examples of this are On the Ground Journalists (Periodistas de a Pie) and the Our Apparent Surrender network (Nuestra Aparente Rendición). Daniela Rea's 'Nadie les pidió perdón' and Paula Mónaco Felipe's 'Ayotzinapa: Horas eternas' are also examples of this ('Periodistas de a Pie' n.d.; 'NAR Nuestra Aparente Rendición' n.d.; Rea 2015; Mónaco Felipe 2015). Besides this, scholars have also contributed by studying this phenomenon and by working with the relatives of the disappeared to develop and systematise skills for their struggle. Carolina Robledo (CIESAS), who is cited throughout this thesis, has offered workshops on on-the-ground search for relatives of the disappeared and is one of the Movimiento por Nuestros Desaparecidos en México's advisors. The Colegio de México's 'Seminar on Violence and Peace' has also organised training for relatives of the disappeared ('Seminario Sobre Violencia y Paz' n.d.; Félix n.d.).

In a fourth level of relationship and organising are the international human rights bodies and organisations that work alongside relatives of the disappeared in the country. The UNCED and the UNWGEID have analysed the case of Mexico and their reports serve as a basis to advance in their requests towards the government (Committee on Enforced Disappearances 2015; United Nations 2011). The IACHR and the IACoHR have also worked on disappearances in the country, emitting precautionary measures for human rights defenders, rulings on disappearances, and collaborating in

the investigation of disappearances. The IACHR has held hearings and published reports on disappearances and human rights violations in Mexico (Inter-American Court of Human Rights 2009; OAS 2016c, 2016a; IACHR n.d.). A good example of the impact of the IACHR was the creation of the International Group of Interdisciplinary Experts (GIEI) for the case of the 43 disappeared Ayotzinapa students.<sup>69</sup>

Other international organisations such as AI, Peace Brigades International, and HRW, which work on human rights in general, have also played an important role in documenting disappearances in the country and in making the information accessible to different audiences (Amnesty International 2013, 2016b, 2015, Human Rights Watch 2013b, 2013a, 2011, 2014a; PBI 2015b). The Office in Mexico of the UN Human Rights High Commissioner has also served as an ally for the organisations of relatives. Finally, there are some other international organisations working more directly on disappearances, which have been key for the work of the organisations in Mexico. The Argentinian Team of Forensic Anthropology (Equipo Argentino de Antropología Forense, EAAF), the Peruvian Team of Forensic Anthropology (Equipo Peruano de Antropología Forense, EPAF), the International Commission on Missing Persons, and other organisations of relatives of the disappeared in other countries (e.g. Colombia, Argentina), have all shared their expertise with the organisations examined in this thesis.

This last category is constituted by a whole set of organisations and bodies which were created in the context of the disappearances of the late 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s mainly in Latin America. The work of the organisations of previous decades in Mexico and elsewhere has been fundamental for this structure to be available, particularly in the first, third and fourth levels. Even if sometimes an acknowledgement of the legacies of the organisations of previous decades is absent, much of what the organisations of relatives from after 2006 are able to do and the resources they have is the result of the work of organisations in previous decades.

As has been described in chapter 2, the international legal framework and human rights infrastructure in terms of enforced disappearances was the result of the work of different Latin American and international human rights NGOs, as well as of the relatives of the disappeared from across the region. The creation of the international declaration, the Inter American and International Conventions on disappearances, as well as of the UNCED and the UNWGEID responded to the pressure that these groups exerted to international bodies. Moreover, specialised organisations such as EAAF and EPAF are the outcome of the search for the disappeared in other countries and of specific knowledge that has been developed to identify the disappeared. Likewise, specific knowledge developed by people in different countries in terms of psychosocial impacts of violence and human rights violence and particularly of disappearances, has served as a starting point for relatives of the second period. Eureka was a pioneer in Mexico in using the human rights discourse to refer to the crimes they were

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<sup>69</sup> See also Chapter 6 for the IACoHR's ruling on the Radilla case.

fighting against. Besides this, both Eureka at the national level and the Comité de Madres de Chihuahua at the local level, as well as other regional committees and other groups of relatives of the disappeared, contributed to the creation of a human rights movement that has proven crucial to the actions and the visibilisation of the relatives of the disappeared of the second period.

Gatti speaks of activists of meaning who, in the void of meaning left after disappearances, work to return meaning by creating different frameworks or languages to understand these crimes, be it academic, legal or scientific (Gatti 2014). As he shows, relatives of the disappeared of the first period as well as professionals working on what he calls the field of the detained-disappeared invested much of their energies in constructing these meanings and developing these frameworks. Relatives of the disappeared of the second period rely on those frameworks, language and meanings to deal with the void of disappearances. The human rights organisations that in many countries were born after state violence and as a result of the effort of the organisations of relatives of the disappeared, serve many times as translators or channels to access these frameworks and languages. Nonetheless, as argued before, because the disappearances of both periods are different, the relatives of the second period have also worked to adapt these frameworks to integrate the particularities of the disappearances they are dealing with.

#### **4.2.2 Actions against Disappearances**

In their role as memory entrepreneurs, the relatives of the disappeared have responded to disappearances and to the discourses on those crimes in a variety of ways during the two periods of disappearances in Mexico. With these actions, they confront the discourse used by state actors across the country in forms that are marked by their context and by the resources available to them. This section presents a panorama of the actions and discourses used by organisations of relatives of the disappeared in their struggle to bring back the disappeared in a literal and symbolic way. As Leticia Hidalgo (FUNDENL) affirms, the state erases the disappeared three times. First, it erases them physically, then, it erases them from the registries, and finally, it erases them from people's memory (SapiensBox 2017). The work of the relatives is then directed to prevent this 'erasing' from happening; physically looking for the disappeared, lobbying for their legal recognition as disappeared persons, and rehumanising them by bringing their memories and their lives to the public sphere.

a) First Period: The Plea for the Freedom of the Disappeared

*Eureka Committee and the Committee of Mothers with Disappeared Children of Chihuahua*

The actions that the relatives of the disappeared have taken over the years are marked by their context. In the first period, state agents carried out disappearances through different entities as a way to deal with political opponents. The actions of the relatives emphasised the government's responsibility and its capacity of setting the disappeared free. Eureka and the Committee of Chihuahua, as well as H.I.J.O.S. have asked for decades that the disappeared are returned alive. The political nature of state violence and of the disappearances has been present in their discourse throughout the years. In recent years, besides raising awareness of the different actions carried out by the state against its own population and preserving the stories of the disappeared, Eureka has dedicated efforts to preserving and making public the history of the struggle for the return alive of the disappeared.

Eureka and the Committee of Mothers with Disappeared Children of Chihuahua resorted to different strategies to put pressure on the government to release the disappeared. Demonstrations (which they called 'paradas') and hunger strikes were two of their signature actions. The *Doñas* in Chihuahua held their 'paradas' outside Chihuahua's House of Government when a federal government official visited Chihuahua, and also on Mother's Day, many times in coordination with other committees across the country (*El Diario de Chihuahua* 1987).

On 28 August 1978 Eureka held their first hunger strike days before the President's yearly address to the nation. More than 80 women from different states of the country gathered outside the Metropolitan Cathedral in Mexico City to ask for the release of the disappeared. Students and social organisations accompanied the hunger strike, and after threats of repression, it ended on 31 August. As a result of the pressure exerted by this hunger strike and in a broader context of what has been called a 'democratic opening' (analysed in chapter 3), President López Portillo (1976-1982) announced at his Annual Presidential Address that an Amnesty Law would be passed on to Congress. This law was passed and as a result 1,500 political prisoners were released, 2,000 detention orders were cancelled, and people in exile were able to return to the country. Nonetheless, this did not have an impact on the disappeared, whose whereabouts continued to be unknown. Furthermore, new disappearances continued to take place in the country.<sup>70</sup> The Committee held more hunger strikes, but marked this date as an important moment of remembrance, as I present in Chapter 6 (*La redacción* 1984).

Along with the hunger strikes, another important action by the members of Eureka and the Committee of Chihuahua was the shutdown of the highway connecting Ciudad Juárez with El Paso, Texas in 1988. Days before Salinas' arrival to presidency, around 30 members of Eureka shut down the highway as a result of President De la Madrid's (1982-1988) silence regarding the whereabouts of the disappeared (Villeda 1988). Even though they closed the road, people in their cars and trucks showed their support to the *Doñas* (De los Ríos Merino 2009). Priscila Chávez Hoyos told me:

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<sup>70</sup> Poniatowska narrates the hunger strike by talking to its protagonists (Poniatowska 1980).

That was a wonderful thing because we are women (...) and we did have the courage to do it! The pain was so big, the anger of not being able to see our relatives, that the same anger gave us the courage to do the things we did. (...) At first, bus drivers were angry but then they understood our struggle, our rage, and then they supported us (Chávez Hoyos 2015).

The blockage was broken when members of Eureka were offered an interview with the Minister of Defense in Mexico City to deal with their demands. After travelling back, they were received by a minor officer (Vera 1988).

Many of the actions of Eureka consisted in raising awareness of the disappearances, so they would organise talks at universities and rallies outside factories and in different places. The Committee worked to disseminate the idea that there were human rights violations in Mexico; a process helped by the creation of national and international solidarity networks (La redacción 1979). According to Rosario Ibarra 'the Mexican government's deafness made them go knocking doors elsewhere' (La redacción 1990). With this, the Committee responded to the discourse of democratisation and to a context in which the Mexican government received exiles from elsewhere in the continent, while disappearing, torturing, and killing political opponents in the country.

Some of their actions consisted, first, in trying to get access to clandestine prisons to search for their relatives, and then, in marking them as such (La redacción 1989). Members of Eureka would follow Presidents and Ministers in their daily activities in Mexico City, Chihuahua and other cities, to confront them in public to ask for their relatives. They would always wear the pictures of their disappeared relatives in order to make them present, as has been done elsewhere and keeps on being done in Mexico. Other campaigns, like creating postcards and asking people to send them to the President to ask for the release of the disappeared, or putting the faces of the disappeared on the walls of the city with the legend 'Kidnapped by the government' were used by Eureka to raise awareness and to ask for solidarity (N/A 1988). Bringing the stories and faces of the disappeared to the public sphere, Eureka rehumanised them and made their absence present.





*Figure 2 Eureka's first hunger strike in 1978 (Guillén 2016).*



*Figure 3 Members of Eureka leading a march for the return alive of the disappeared in 1978 (Guillén 2016).*

Eureka also lobbied for enforced disappearances to be recognised as a crime and punished accordingly. At their first international congress in 1981 FEDEFAM, of which Eureka was part, called for the creation of national and international frameworks against this crime as one of their first resolutions (FEDEFAM n.d.). In this regard, Rosario Ibarra, at the time congresswoman, presented an Amnesty Law in 1985. As the amnesty granted by President López Portillo in 1978 did not achieve the freedom of the disappeared, this second document, besides seeking amnesty for the new political prisoners, sought the liberation of the detained-disappeared. This bill indicated that those responsible for the crime should be brought to Justice (Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores n.d.). FNCR presented another bill including enforced disappearances in 2008 (E. Sánchez 2008; Concha 2008).

None of these initiatives were approved by the congressional chambers at the national level. Nonetheless, enforced disappearances were included as a crime in 2000 in Mexico City, following Ibarra's lobbying (Amnesty International 2000).



Figure 4 Eureka's banners are displayed at a concert in Mexico City by Argentinean singer Liliana Felipe in 2012 (Jiménez n.d.).

From 2008 and as a way to reactivate the Committee's work, some of its members, along with H.I.J.O.S., organised monthly 'paradas' outside the Nation's Supreme Court of Justice (SCJN). This activity was started in September 2008, commemorating the thirtieth anniversary of Juan Chávez Hoyos' disappearance. In 2014, after more than five years going on a monthly basis to the SCJN, H.I.J.O.S. changed the activity and started going to different squares or public places in Mexico City every month to symbolically bring the disappeared to other parts of the city. This lasted a few months, as after the disappearance of the 43 Ayotzinapa students they became more involved in the solidarity movement with the parents of the disappeared students and stopped this activity. During the last years, part of the work of Eureka has been to preserve the memory of the state violence but also the memory of their own struggle. One of the more recent actions of the committee was the opening of the Indomitable Memory House Museum in which the history of the Committee and the fight for the



disappeared are portrayed (Gálvez Girón 2015).<sup>71</sup> As I analyse in chapter 6, a low social will to remember the disappeared from the first period and Eureka's work influenced the creation of the House as a memory realm. As affirmed by Nora, these are created when memory does not occur spontaneously (Nora 1989).



Figure 5 'Parada' organised by Eureka and H.I.J.O.S. outside the Nation's Supreme Court of Justice in 2009 (Jiménez n.d.).

#### *H.I.J.O.S. México*

As a pivotal organisation, H.I.J.O.S. has adopted the demands of Eureka, and adapted or created new strategies in the struggle for the disappeared, many times influenced by their belonging to an international network of sister organisations. Besides, H.I.J.O.S. has developed ties with organisations of the second period of disappearances in Mexico with which they collaborate for actions and events.

In terms of Eureka's legacy, and even with the passing of the years and decades, H.I.J.O.S. has kept the 'return alive' demand as one of their main causes. As I have shown in chapter 2, organisations in other countries do not use that demand anymore in face of the evidence of the killing of the disappeared. H.I.J.O.S. continues to denounce the sites and the perpetrators of the state violence that left tortured, killed, and disappeared people from the 1970s mainly through *escraches*, renaming of streets, and different campaigns. Much of their efforts are directed at the construction of social justice.

Escraches were invented in Argentina in 1996; the word comes from Buenos Aires' slang and means to shed light on something previously hidden. With a carnivalesque atmosphere, bringing music and performance, the attention is brought to the crimes of a perpetrator and to impunity (Druliolle 2013; N. Bravo 2012; Benegas 2011; Chaves and Nuñez 2012; Catela 2001; Kaiser 2005b, 2002, 2000; Taylor

<sup>71</sup> The Museum is analysed in chapter 6.

2002). While in Argentina protesters go to the houses of the perpetrators, in Mexico that is not possible. The exception to this is former president Echeverría, who has been 'escrachado' by H.I.J.O.S. along with Eureka and the Comité 68 (set up after the 2 of October 1968 massacre) on several occasions (Radio Combate 2009; Regeneración Radio 2006; Abajoelmuro 2009). Otherwise, 'escraches' in Mexico have mostly been to specific places known to be clandestine prisons, or to institutions that have perpetrated impunity (e.g. the National Migration Institute, the CNDH, the ex DFS' building, and the PRI national headquarters) (Ké Huelga Radio 2011; Colaboración n.d.).

Another place that was singled out by Eureka throughout the decades and that H.I.J.O.S. has continued to denounce is the Military Camp No.1. In 2011, when human rights organisations were denouncing the involvement of the armed forces in human rights violations, the federal government launched a campaign to improve the image of the army. Billboards and TV advertisements were put in place. In these ads the army was portrayed as 'Mexico's Big Force'. The Military Camp No.1 was open on weekends for family bike rides. In this context H.I.J.O.S. organised an 'escrache' to denounce the irony of opening the gates of the military camp while having clandestine prisons inside and restricting the information on the actual use of this camp (Patxe 2011; Petrich 2011).



*Figure 6 A member of Eureka protests outside the Military Camp No.1 (Jiménez n.d.).*



Figure 7 Escrache to PGR in 2015 (H.I.J.O.S. México n.d.).

Another strategy used by H.I.J.O.S. to denounce those responsible for the state violence and to make visible those killed and disappeared people is street renaming. As Allier states, '(t)he plaques, the names of streets, are political dilemmas'. Therefore, they are always specifically linked to the history of political struggle. A plaque, the name of a street, also denote a vision of the nation's past, and are a way of writing or rewriting history on public thoroughfares' (Allier Montaño 2008). Under Mexico City's legislation, citizens may ask the local government to change their street's name. In the context of the battles for memory and for creating a version of the past that is transmitted to the next generations, H.I.J.O.S. developed a symbolic action: to change the street signs to put the names of disappeared or killed people instead of the name of those responsible for killings or disappearances. H.I.J.O.S. introduces these actions by saying: 'because those guilty of genocide do not deserve to have a street with their name on it. Because no one deserves to live in a street with the name of someone who committed genocide' ('Renombramiento de Una de Las Calles Díaz Ordaz' 2008). Then, a street named Luis Echeverría was renamed Epifanio Avilés Rojas. The name of the President in whose sexenio the majority of the enforced disappearances were committed is symbolically replaced by the name of the first person forcibly disappeared in Mexico (Olivares Alonso 2015; H.I.J.O.S. México n.d.).

In 2009, Mexico City's Human Rights Commission coordinated an effort with several local offices to create Mexico City's Human Rights Programme, which included the renaming of streets (Secretaría Técnica del Comité Coordinador para la elaboración del Diagnóstico y Programa de Derechos Humanos del Distrito Federal. Dirección de Difusión y Publicaciones de la Comisión de Derechos Humanos del Distrito Federal 2009, 255). The changes should have been made in the medium term, but nothing has been done. Other collectives have also used this strategy. During demonstrations



against the enforced disappearance of 43 students of Ayotzinapa, streets were symbolically renamed as 'students', 'normalista', 'disappeared', 'narcogovernment', and 'repression' ('FOTOS: "Bautizan" Calles Del Distrito Federal Tras Caso Ayotzinapa – Publimetro' n.d.). Besides this, H.I.J.O.S. has also carried out different campaigns to raise awareness on disappearances in Mexico.

H.I.J.O.S. works in the recovery of memory in three complementary ways: the memory of repression, the memory of the disappeared, and the memory of the struggle of the relatives of the disappeared. For H.I.J.O.S. it is important to recover not only the political life of the disappeared, but also their personal life, rehumanising them (Karl 2014a). According to the group, social justice or social condemnation can only be built when memory exists. The biographies of the disappeared are shared on social media and during their actions. The struggle of the relatives of the disappeared, which is not largely recognised in the Mexican public sphere, is brought back and acknowledged by H.I.J.O.S.



*Figure 8 H.I.J.O.S. changes the name of the street Luis Echeverría to José de Jesús Ávila disappeared on April 5th, 1974 by members of the DFS (Blancas Madrigal 2006; 'José de Jesús Ávila González: Desaparecido Hace 41 Años Por La Contrainsurgencia Del Estado Mexicano.' n.d.).*

Understanding state violence in Mexico as part of a regional pattern, H.I.J.O.S. organised the H.I.J.O.S.' International Encounter in 2010. Through different events, the encounter served to raise awareness on the disappearances of previous decades, to talk about the struggle against these disappearances, and to connect these stories to disappearances being committed in the country at the time ('Programa Encuentro Internacional de H.I.J.O.S.' n.d.; H.I.J.O.S. México n.d.; Olivares Alonso n.d.). H.I.J.O.S. organised an escrache at the United States Embassy highlighting the role that the United States had in the regional state sponsored terrorism of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s.



Figure 9 Escrache to the United States Embassy organised by H.I.J.O.S.'s international network in 2010 ('H.I.J.O.S. MÉXICO - Photos. Escrache Internacional de H.I.J.O.S.' n.d.).



Figure 10 Poster by H.I.J.O.S. México connecting disappearances of women from both periods (Courtesy H.I.J.O.S. México).

The image reads: '(T)he disappeared women are missing from all of us. Another government, the same impunity.' The black and white pictures come from the disappeared from the late 1960s onwards, and the coloured ones are of women disappeared during the last decades. In an image, the two periods of disappearances are integrated under the same slogan. In its role as a pivotal organisation, H.I.J.O.S. has emphasised the role of impunity of the crimes of the past as one of the causes of the disappearances crisis of today.

#### b) Second Period

In the second period, the demands made to the government are based on general and specific treaties on human rights and enforced disappearances. In general, the demands are not to set the disappeared free -except from cases in which the involvement of state agents is clear, as is the case of Ayotzinapa- but to comply with the government's obligations in terms of search, of guarantees of non-repetition, of justice, and of guaranteeing everyone's right not to be disappeared. Some actions are similar to those undertaken in the previous period, like holding marches, demonstrations, and actions looking to raise awareness on disappearances and looking to create a social will to remember. Nonetheless, the relatives of the disappeared of the second period have developed a whole range of actions particular to this context. Having clarity on what the government should be doing, many times these organisations take on these actions. The work of human rights organisations with their specific skills has been particularly important.

The four groups of relatives of the disappeared that I have selected are accompanied by human rights organisations. Their expertise in dealing with human rights violations has impacted the actions of the relatives. Contrary to what happened in the previous period, the relatives of the disappeared spend much of their efforts pushing for an adequate legal follow-up of their cases. CEDEHM, CADHAC, and the FJdL have a designated area of legal accompaniment that works with a group of relatives (AMORES and FUNDEC-M, respectively). Even though FUNDENL does not have a legal area, they give the pertinent follow-up to their cases.

The same accompaniment by human rights organisations has helped in putting an emphasis on the psychosocial support to the relatives. This approach, which is the result of the processes of accompaniment in zones of state violence in previous decades, has been one of the pillars of the work of CADHAC, FJdL, and CEDEHM.<sup>72</sup> The psychosocial support has also been one of the recurrent points on the workshops offered to organisations from across the country, in which AMORES, CEDEHM, FUNDEC-M, FUNDENL, H.I.J.O.S., and Eureka to a lesser extent, have participated.

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<sup>72</sup> For more on the psychosocial approach, see Martín-Baró 1994; Beristain and Donà 1999; Beristain 2000; Beristain and Páez 2000; Beristain 2008, 2012.





Figure 11 Mural situated at CEDEHM's common room elaborated as the result of a psychosocial attention process in 2014 (CEDEHM 2014).<sup>73</sup>

As in previous decades, relatives of the disappeared work tirelessly to put pressure on the government and to raise awareness of the disappearance crisis. Each of the organisations holds demonstrations and events at the local level, from marches to conferences, talks in schools, universities, exposure on the local and national media, to more symbolic events like taking up a public space,<sup>74</sup> embroidering handkerchiefs with the names of the disappeared in public spaces, creating photo exhibitions, and campaigns on social media.<sup>75</sup> CADHAC, CEDEHM and the FJdL Human Rights centre have communications areas through which they disseminate their messages. At the national level, the relatives of the disappeared have organised marches, prominently among them is the one on 10 May.<sup>76</sup> Another example was President Calderón's farewell demonstration outside Palacio de Bellas Artes in Mexico City in November 2012 organised by FUUNDEC-FUNDEM (Antillón 2012; Pastrana n.d.). With these actions, the relatives of the disappeared disseminate key messages in the public sphere, countering the government's discourse. The main messages shared by the relatives are that the state should protect everyone against disappearances and should comply with its obligations of search, justice, and truth in the existent cases; that the disappeared are people with names and stories and not only numbers; and that their families will not rest until they find them. With these actions, again, the relatives of the disappeared act as activists of meaning (Gatti) and memory entrepreneurs (Jelin) (Gatti 2014; Jelin 2003b).

<sup>73</sup> The mural is divided in three sections. The first one represents the events in which police officers disappeared eight men of the Muñoz family during a father's day celebration in 2011. The second section portrays the international solidarity and the accompaniment received from CEDEHM. The third section represents what relatives would want: all the disappeared coming back and being greeted by their loved ones.

<sup>74</sup> See Chapter 6 for the analysis of the Square of the Disappeared in Monterrey, Nuevo León.

<sup>75</sup> For some examples of these actions, see: CADHAC - Ciudadanos en Apoyo a los Derechos Humanos 2015; Montero n.d.; CADHAC, n.d.; 'Buscan Sensibilizar Sobre Desapariciones En NL Con Exposición Fotográfica "Detrás de Las Cifras, Existen Historias"' 2014.

<sup>76</sup> See Chapter 6 on the memorialisation on Mother's Day.



Figure 12 Members of FUUNDEC at a demonstration in the centre of Saltillo, Coahuila in 2018 (Fuerzas Unidas por Nuestros Desaparecidos en Coahuila 2018).



Figure 13 Members of AMORES and CADHAC at a meeting with Roberta Jacobson, US Ambassador to Mexico, 2016 (CADHAC 2016).

The relatives of the disappeared of the second period have also assumed some of the governmental tasks. Among these, the work on investigation and forensics is prominent. As reported by national and international human rights organisations, the government's performance regarding investigations is very poor. In the majority of the cases, the relatives are the ones who do this (United Nations 2011; Human Rights Watch 2013b, 62–65; Amnesty International 2016b, 17; OAS 2016a, 12). Even though it is a governmental duty to search for the disappeared, the efforts in this matter are limited. Confronted with the frustration of seeing that the government is not looking for their loved ones, relatives have come together to organise citizen-led searches.

After the disappearance of the 43 Ayotzinapa students, and with the government's false statement that their bodies had been found in a clandestine grave, relatives of the students and people in solidarity started organising citizen squads to search for them. Following this, a new organisation was created in Iguala 'Los otros desaparecidos' (the other disappeared), who look for their disappeared relatives in the same zone where the students were disappeared. If before this, organisations like VIDA in Torreón, Coahuila and others were already searching in the ground, many other relatives started organising to do this after the reality of mass graves in the country became undeniable (Robledo Silvestre n.d.; "Familiares Somos Los Otros Desaparecidos" | El Universal' n.d.; Reportaje TeleSUR: México, Violencia Silenciada 2017; Pérez Salazar 2014; Campa 2015; 'Los Otros Desaparecidos de Iguala' 2015; 'Mexico: The Other Disappeared' 2015). FUNDENL is notable in this matter. They have carried out several searches, many times finding human remains and what they call extermination sites (places where bodies have been destroyed) (Carrizales 2016; FUNDENL 2017b, 2017a; A. Castillo 2017; fundenl 2015). Much of the information on how to perform these searches has been passed from one organisation to another, and learned from organisations that have done this elsewhere ('Grupo Vida Participa En Búsqueda En Nuevo León' 2015; Brigada Nacional de Búsqueda de Personas Desaparecidas 2017).

With the experience of the ineffectiveness of state agencies in terms of identification, organisations have also pushed for international bodies (e.g. EAAF and EPAF) to help in this matter. FUNDENL has also performed the first citizen-led exhumation and identification of a body. Brenda Damaris González Solís was disappeared in 2011 in Nuevo León. Following a car accident, she called her family saying that a Traffic Police Unit was arriving to the site. After that, her whereabouts were unknown. The traffic police officers that arrived to the site were identified but have not been detained. In 2012 her family visited a site in which an informant told them a clandestine grave had been found, but army officials threatened them for being there. The family was later informed that human remains had been found and that some of those were Brenda Damaris'. The handover of the remains was full of irregularities documented by FUNDENL, so the organisation asked for an independent forensic analysis. The local government accepted and the EPAF along with Gobernanza Forense Ciudadana performed the tasks. The results were positive, indicating that the remains were indeed Brenda Damaris. The family then had the certainty that the remains were hers and this process set a precedent for future cases. This case showed a lack of professionalism in the work of the forensic



services that can be found across the country, and which revictimises the relatives of the disappeared by denying them the certainty of their loved ones' fate (FUNDENL n.d., n.d.; Schwartz-Marin and Cruz-Santiago 2014). Several organisations, among them FUNDENL have teamed up to create an independent DNA database (Schwartz-Marin and Cruz-Santiago 2014; Observatorio Nacional Ciudadano 2017). As with other topics of this second period, the accompaniment of human rights organisations and the communication between organisations of relatives of the disappeared have been crucial.



*Figure 14 Forensic anthropologists and a member of FUNDENL at the exhumation of Brenda Damaris in 2014. (Courtesy Paula Mónaco Felipe)*

#### **4.2.3 Relationship with the Government**

The different relationships of the organisations of relatives of the disappeared and supporting organisations with the government are marked by the characteristics of the disappearances of each period and by the context in which the interaction occurs. In the first period, the relationship of the organisations studied in this thesis was entirely confrontational. In the second period, the relationship of the organisations analysed here presents a mixture of collaboration and confrontation.

##### **a) First Period**

Eureka and the Committee of Mothers with Disappeared Children of Chihuahua met with every President from Luis Echeverría (1970-1976) to Vicente Fox (2000-2006), as well as with different government officials. For example, the relatives of Chihuahua met Carlos Salinas 17 times during his

administration. During these, he repeatedly told them that the case of the people disappeared from Chihuahua was going to be solved (De los Ríos Merino 2009; Aguayo 2001). Eureka presented the list of the 557 disappeared persons they had registered since 1969 and demanded their return alive. The reports that Eureka filled and the lists they handed to every president when starting their mandate asking for the whereabouts of their sons and daughters are not legal reports, but an account of the facts, and by bringing 557 cases to the president in turn they showed a measure of political pressure (De los Ríos Merino 2015).

In 2006, when Felipe Calderón became president, Rosario Ibarra was elected Senator for the PRD. This party, with Andrés Manuel López Obrador as presidential candidate, did not recognise Calderón as their President, claiming that he had committed electoral fraud. Ibarra followed this position and did not ask for a meeting with Calderón. Every previous President had received them and assured them they would take care of the problem. Former President López Portillo affirmed: 'I cannot offer you but the honest, deep search of the truth regarding your children, before my mandate ends' (Reveles 1982). During the late 1980s and early 1990s, the federal and local government's responses in private meetings indicated that they would set the disappeared free, implying that they were kept –alive- in clandestine prisons ('Esperan Libertad de Presos Políticos de Chihuahua Tras Promesa de CSG', n.d.). Their trust in government decreased as time passed by (Hinojosa 1984). During the meetings and in communications with the committees, authorities gave different deadlines for having an answer on the disappeared, but constantly broke them. To this, the relatives' response was to keep the pressure and, as commented above, to create national and international solidarity networks that would also put pressure on the government and that would echo the relatives' 'obstinate memory' (Jelin 2003b, XIV).

The *Doñas* from Chihuahua and Mexico in general had an ever more critical position towards the government. As will be analysed in chapter 5, when the National and some local Human Rights Commissions were created, the different governments wanted the *Doñas*' backing on the initiatives, which they did not give. After the release of the CNDH report on disappearances, the members of Eureka manifested their disapproval, considering that it did not provide reliable information and it did not reveal the whereabouts of the disappeared. When FEMOSPP was created in 2001, Eureka did not participate due to previous experiences and was outspoken in their rejection throughout the whole process. For its part, the Committee of Mothers did engage with this process as they saw a possibility of justice and truth regarding the disappearances of the 1970s and 1980s (De los Ríos Merino 2015). Nonetheless, they quickly realised that there was not political will to pursue this (De los Ríos Merino 2009).

*H.I.J.O.S.*

Of the organisations analysed in this thesis, H.I.J.O.S. is the one with less direct contact with the government. As previously pointed out, Eureka was disappointed by the government's unwillingness to solve the cases of the disappearances since the late 1960s onwards. Coming from that experience, H.I.J.O.S. did not ask for justice from the government, whom they do not consider their interlocutor. Instead, the collective has worked to denounce impunity, and to create social justice, which means social awareness of the crimes so that society will condemn the culprits. This position towards the government has also been influenced by the position of collectives of H.I.J.O.S. elsewhere.

H.I.J.O.S. has not been part of the organisation for a national legal framework on disappearances, and it is not part of the Movement for our Disappeared in Mexico, although they have worked with many of the organisations that conform it. Nonetheless, during the last years, H.I.J.O.S. has collaborated with many organisations of relatives of the disappeared from the two periods and with human rights organisations on creating human rights shadow reports presented to different international bodies. These are reports created by a coalition of NGOs to international bodies to complement the official information that governments present. Examples of this were the shadow reports submitted to the UNCED (2010) and to the UNWGEID (2014). It also presented some of the cases they have registered to the Permanent People's Tribunal (PPT), an opinion international tribunal established to be an 'instrument and platform to give recognition, visibility and a voice to the peoples suffering violations of their fundamental rights, victims who, according to the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Peoples, proclaimed in Algiers in 1976, were marginalized in international law' (H.I.J.O.S. México 2014a; Permanent Peoples' Tribunal n.d.). H.I.J.O.S. contributed to these reports and participated in the Tribunal as one more way of building social justice by making the impunity of the disappearances of past decades public and setting them up as a precedent for the current disappearances.

In a moment of a big disappearances crisis, one of the main contributions this collective has made to these processes has been the inclusion of the cases of the first period of disappearances, as well as of the historical impunity that has resulted. H.I.J.O.S.'s main contribution to these instances has been the inclusion of a historical memory that would be otherwise missing in many of the discourses on recent disappearances. When several organisations presented shadow reports to the CED in 2014 prior to Mexico's examination in 2015, H.I.J.O.S.'s highlighted the disappearances for political reasons and the long lasting impunity. Besides this, H.I.J.O.S. emphasised the role that PRI governments prior to 2000 had in disappearances (H.I.J.O.S. México 2014b). As Edith López Ovalle told me: 'the contribution of H.I.J.O.S. resides in showing that there is a struggle, not only that the crime has been committed since the 1970s, but that from that moment onwards and until today there has been resistance from the relatives' (López Ovalle 2015).

## b) Second Period

Whereas in the first period the relatives' relationship with the government was mostly critical and confrontational, the relationship in the second period is more varied. The existent legal framework along with the context of specialised organisations has impacted on the ways the relatives interact with the state. Although they still have a critical position and work to make the state comply with its obligations (which seem clearer and connected with their international commitments in terms of human rights), relatives of the disappeared also work with the government in a more direct way.

In this regard, the two organisations working against disappearances in Nuevo León, CADHAC and FUNDENL, have a different stand towards the government. Whilst CADHAC has a more cooperative relationship, FUNDENL's position is more critical and confrontational. This difference was one of the reasons why relatives who were firstly accompanied by CADHAC were told to leave and created their own collective in 2012. After the Caravan of Solace visited Monterrey in 2011 and CADHAC had their first hearing with local authorities, they established working groups that take place periodically. After each one of their encounters, CADHAC releases a press communiqué or holds a joint press conference. CADHAC also promotes and participates in meetings with the prosecutors and public servants from Tamaulipas who travel to Nuevo León to meet the relatives of the disappeared working with CADHAC and to follow up their cases ('Revisan Avances de Regios Desaparecidos En Tamaulipas - Grupo Milenio' n.d.). CADHAC has collaborated deeply with the government, and as a result of this they have jointly created the Protocolo de Búsqueda Inmediata (Immediate Search Protocol) and the Grupo Especializado de Búsqueda Inmediata (Immediate Search Special Group) ('Grupo Especializado En Búsqueda Inmediata (GEBI)' n.d.), both of which have been mentioned by the UNWGEID as best practice in terms of collaboration between the state and civil society (CADHAC 2015). According to CADHAC, the local government has the political will to find the disappeared, but in many cases the investigations have reached a dead end in which authorities can do nothing else (Sánchez Reyna 2015; Torres Martínez 2015).

FUNDENL's approach is more critical. They have established evaluation groups (mesas de evaluación) -instead of working groups- with the government to follow up on their cases. FUNDENL does not participate in joint press conferences or jointly produce communiqués (González Ramírez 2015). Around the same dates in which CADHAC appeared in local media speaking of the good work the local government was doing, FUNDENL organised a demonstration in the Square of the Disappeared to denounce the local government's incompetence and to say they were going to take legal action against them (González Ramírez 2015; FUNDENL 2015). The Square of the Disappeared, analysed in chapter 6, was created as a way of putting pressure on the government and of creating awareness on disappearances in the state. As presented above, FUNDENL has criticised the government's failure to search for the disappeared and has carried out their own citizen-led searches. It is important to note that many times the searches carried out by citizen groups need coordination with the government, as many times police officers, forensic teams, and public

prosecutors are involved. FUNDENL has consistently denounced that even though there is a degree of coordination with the state, FUNDENL leads the expeditions and searches, and state agents contribute minimally (FUNDENL 2017b, 2017a, 2016b, 2016a; fundenl 2015b). In July 2015, FUNDENL presented an evaluation made to the local prosecutor's office in which they established that the local government was not working as it should. This strategy was chosen by FUNDENL before the local elections to oppose the discourse that the local prosecutor's office sustained in terms of the progress made regarding disappearances ('Reprueban a PGJ de NL En Materia de Personas Desaparecidas' n.d.).

In Chihuahua, CEDEHM's approach to the government has recently changed. When the fieldwork for this thesis was carried out, members of CEDEHM affirmed that the government did not acknowledge the existence of disappeared persons in the state, so much of their work had to be dedicated to push for the government's acknowledge of the scale of the problem. AI's report on disappearances in Mexico from 2016 depicts the situation of disappearances in Chihuahua and the governmental treatment to the relatives. The local government of the time denied the report's findings (Gómez Escárcega 2015; Sáenz Solís 2015; Amnesty International 2016b; Mayorga 2016). The new administration has acknowledged the problem, affirmed that the previous government willingly hid the numbers of disappeared persons, and promised that a new prosecutor's office on grave human rights violations with a specialised unit on disappeared persons would be installed. That prosecutor office would be the first of its kind in Mexico. Besides this, the local government has acceded to the families' demand of working with the EAAF to identify human remains, and have so far identified seven persons (La redacción 2017; 'Promete Corral Crear Fiscalía Para Desaparecidos En Chihuahua' 2016; 'Atiende Gobernador de Chihuahua a Familias de Personas Desaparecidas' 2017). CEDEHM did not have working groups with the government when interviews were performed, but they did accompany the relatives of the disappeared to the case revision and provided them with legal assistance and guidance. CEDEHM has worked closely with the new local government in the creation of the new special prosecutor's office and in the follow up of the work with EAAF.

Having a demanding discourse towards the state and with the accompaniment of FJdL, FUUNDEC-M has managed to work with the government in several initiatives in the search of the disappeared. When in 2009 the relatives of the disappeared organised themselves collectively, the first governmental approach was to assign 'godfathers' and 'godmothers' to each family. These were supposed to follow up each case and to 'help' the relatives in their dialogue with the local government. This strategy was quickly rejected by the relatives, who wanted to work collectively. Blanca Martínez explained how this strategy had already been used in Coahuila with the families of the Pasta de Conchos explosion. Having separate 'padrinos' for each family was intended to weaken the level of organisation as every family had to deal and negotiate demands with a different person (B. Martínez 2015; PBI 2016).



FUUNDEC has had collective hearings with the government since 2010, and has established a formal setting of case revision in which the different levels of government are present. Families from many cities across the country organised in FUNDEM travel to Coahuila to review the progress made on their cases, while other cases are reviewed in Mexico City with federal authorities. According to Jorge Verástegui, these case reviews are an achievement that has not helped families that are not members of FUUNDEC-M, as they still report that they are not allowed to see their files or to know how their cases are developing, even though that constitutes a right under Mexican legislation (Verástegui González 2015).

FUUNDEC has also put pressure on the local government to use their funds for making these meetings possible. FUUNDEC has established working groups on search and investigation, legislation, and comprehensive redress, and an Autonomous Working Group to follow the implementation of the recommendations made by the UNWGEID. The Autonomous Working Group is formed by one member of FUUNDEC, one representative from the Juan Gerardi Human Rights Centre, one representative from the FJdL, one from the Office in Mexico of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, and one representative from the Coahuila state government (FUUNDEC n.d.). FUUNDEC achieved a state level law on disappearances, as well as a law of absence due to disappearance (analysed in chapter 2) (*El Siglo Coahuila* n.d.). FUUNDEC-M's work has managed to integrate various sectors of different levels of government, as well as several human rights organisations.

The different approaches that organisations of the first and second period have had towards the governments have probably responded to their contexts and to the specific demands they were and are making to the state. In this regard, the relatives of the first period had a direct interlocution with state agents to demand the return alive of their relatives, but were constantly disappointed by the lack of effective responses. As I have shown above, the relatives of the second period are constantly working with and demanding specific actions from the local and federal governments, based on a robust knowledge of what these governments should be doing and what needs to be done in order to search for the disappeared, to identify them in case they are not alive, to revert the tendency in terms of disappearances and to bring comprehensive reparations to the victims. In this second period there is a broad range of organisations and a big variety of positions towards the state, many of which have not been analysed in this thesis and could be studied in future research.

In the Colombian context, Tate questions the scope and limitations of the professionalisation of the human rights movement. This author explains that such professionalisation can impose certain restrictions to organisations that start working under the human rights framework and have to leave aside other more radical perspectives (Tate 2007). This is of course a valid critique but it would be the aim of further studies to explore how the Mexican organisations see this process of professionalisation, and if they see it as something that limits or that enhances their actions.

As a way of conclusion to this section it is also important to mention the collective work of the organisations of relatives of the disappeared from the second period. By getting together first with the MPJyD in 2011 and later with what since 2015 has been called the Movement for our Disappeared in Mexico, they have been able to maintain a dialogue with federal authorities. Contrary to private meetings sustained by relatives of the first period, many of the meetings have taken place in public spaces and have been widely shared in the media and social media. During the first period, Eureka had meetings with state officials in which Presidents, prosecutors and different ministers implied that they would set the disappeared free. The public governmental discourse was, nonetheless, mainly one of silence and denial on the mere past and present existence of disappearances.

During the second period, the level of engagement between state officials and organisations of relatives of the disappeared has gradually increased, which has mainly responded to the visibility of the human rights crisis and to national and international pressure to deal with it. An important first moment in this was the public meeting held between the Calderón administration and the MPJyD in 2011. After a public outcry about the human rights violations as a result of the so-called 'War on Drugs', this meeting was livestreamed on radio and television. Having President Calderón and the first line of his administration in dialogue with relatives of victims aimed at presenting an image that human rights violations were being dealt with (Herrera Beltrán and Urrutia 2011). In the same way, the Peña Nieto administration has had meetings with relatives of the victims in strategic moments. Two illustrative events were the meeting held by Peña Nieto with relatives of the 43 disappeared Ayotzinapa students in October 2014 and the one held with relatives of the disappeared gathered in the Movimiento Nacional por Nuestros Desaparecidos in 2017. The first meeting was private but after it the President gave a message on national television speaking of the important results of the dialogue. With this, to the national and international movement asking for results on this case, the President responded with meeting the relatives of the disappeared, although both parties saw the meeting's result differently, as explained in chapter 7.

Likewise, Peña Nieto held a high profile event with members of the Movement for our Disappeared in Mexico after signing the enactment of the federal law on disappearances in late 2017. National and international human rights bodies (e.g. UNCED, UNWGEID, Centro ProDH, and Movement for Our Disappeared in Mexico) had emphasised the necessity of creating a federal law on disappearances with the input of the victims. In this second period, many meetings with ministers and prosecutors have been more or less reported in the media and have served both parties' purposes. For the government these meetings would ideally serve to create better public policies to tackle disappearances more effectively. Besides this, these meetings can be reported to national and international human rights bodies as a sign of dialogue with the victims and of progress in dealing with disappearances. For the relatives of the disappeared these meetings are also beneficial as they get exposure and can put pressure on state officials to comply with the agreements made.

The two periods of disappearances presented in chapter 3 set the context for the actions of organisations of relatives of the disappeared and for the interactions they have with different levels and agencies of the state. As I have previously shown, there are some fundamental differences among the disappearances of the two periods, which have impacted in the demands and the ways in which the relatives have positioned themselves vis-à-vis different governments. In this chapter, I have shown how besides the differences in the types of disappearances, there has also been a change in terms of the human rights infrastructure between the two periods. At a regional level, the relatives of the first period worked to create a legal framework to prevent and punish disappearances. Moreover, in Mexico and elsewhere, the relatives of the disappeared had an important role in creating a broader human rights movement. Both the existing legal framework and the network of human rights organisations working in Mexico and at an international level have been fundamental to frame the work and demands of the relatives of the disappeared of the second period. The demands of the organisations of the second period are then framed in a legal and human rights discourse and these groups can make specific demands in those terms to the different agencies of the state, which is a result of the development started by relatives and organisations of the first period.

This analytical conclusion does not seem to be widely shared amongst the relatives of the disappeared of the second period. In my work with organisations of relatives of the disappeared of both periods, I have noted that there are some organisations and particularly some individuals within these organisations who do acknowledge this continuity line and the work of the relatives of the first period. Nonetheless, during my fieldwork carried out in 2015, many of the interviewees did not know the history of disappearances or that they have been occurring for decades and even before the so-called 'War on Drugs'. This might be explained by the lack of a collective memory about the disappearances of the first period, but also, and as I show at different points in this thesis, to the fact that disappearances of both periods are seen as different phenomena by many actors.

## CHAPTER 5 NAMING THE DISAPPEARED IN MEXICO

Disappearances have taken place in Mexico for nearly 50 years in different contexts and with the involvement of different actors. The ways in which this practice has been named have changed, too. The manner in which disappearances have been conceptualised demonstrates the battles for memory between the relatives of the disappeared and the different governments. As Jelin affirms, the battles in the public space are not battles of memory versus silence, but many times these are battles of different memories contending to be the predominant memory (Jelin 2003b). In this sense, the different ways in which disappearances have been portrayed reflect a battle over different meanings in dispute. As I show below, the relatives of the disappeared of the two periods have insisted on the government's responsibility in the crimes and in solving the crimes, while different governments' responses have minimised the problem and denied the state's responsibility for the crimes.

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first and second sections of the chapter analyse the ways in which disappearances have been portrayed and the battles over those conceptualisations in the two main periods of disappearances in Mexico. The third section examines the strategies used by the government of blaming the victim, relating it to the idea of the disposableness of the victims (Butler 2016). Understanding this is essential to my analysis of how the actions carried out by the relatives of the disappeared to memorialise and bring their loved ones back to the public space represent a strategy against the dehumanisation carried out by state actors (Karl 2014a).

### 5.1 Naming the Absence: the Disappeared for Political Reasons (1960s onwards)

#### 5.1.1 The Relatives' Struggle to Name a Politically Motivated Absence

As I argued in chapter 2, the term 'disappeared' was used as early as 1966 in Guatemala for describing one of the tactics used by the government to deal with political opponents in that country. The term was then widely adopted as enforced disappearances were carried out throughout the region. When the first committee of relatives of the disappeared was created in Mexico in 1977 -the Committee for the Defence of Prisoners, Persecuted, Disappeared and Politically Exiled People in Mexico-<sup>77</sup> their name already included the category disappeared, distinguishing it from kidnapped, tortured, and political prisoners. At the time, there was already a history of disappearances in the country and elsewhere in Latin America and the implication of the state in the disappearances was clear. In different countries across Latin America, relatives of the disappeared were also putting pressure on their governments for the return of the disappeared. The fact that Mexico played an important role in receiving exiles from the Southern Cone probably impacted in the way the committee

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<sup>77</sup> As explained in Chapter 4, the Committee later changed their name to Comité Eureka.

understood these crimes, as they could learn from experiences elsewhere. An example of this was Rosario Ibarra and Laura Bonaparte's friendship. Bonaparte was a founding member of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo Línea Fundadora in exile in Mexico. During her time in Mexico, she supported Eureka's actions for the disappeared (Balerini 2014). Bonaparte contributed to the creation of the Convention against enforced disappearance, so her relationship with Ibarra and Eureka fed into Eureka's insistence on emphasising the state's role in enforced disappearances. As mentioned above, Eureka's membership in FEDEFAM also contributed to this collective's insistence on the creation of a legal framework against this crime.

Eureka documents show this collective used the categories detained-disappeared, kidnapped by the government, disappeared, and disappeared for political reasons interchangeably in their publications during the 1970s and 1980s. All the categories used by Eureka highlighted the implication of the state, its responsibility, and its capacity and obligation of clarifying the whereabouts of the disappeared. These categories were related to the 'presentación con vida' (return alive) slogan used by the relatives, which was a direct demand put to the government.

As I analyse in chapter 2, one of the complexities of enforced disappearances is the uncertainty of the fate of the disappeared, and whether they are alive or dead. In this matter, Eureka has insisted on the responsibility of the state and demanded that the government return the disappeared alive. Rosario Ibarra said:

We are not accepting dead bodies so easily and we are not accepting a simple paper saying this person died and that is it... Not at all! Our slogan is 'vivos los llevaron, vivos los queremos' (they took them alive, we want them back alive) and they will have to figure out how to comply with that. And if they have killed them, they will have to admit it. Where are they? Where are they buried? Who killed them? We have 140 testimonies from people that we have rescued from clandestine prisons who say they saw them alive. Then, if they killed them in cold-blood, that is another story, that is a totally different thing. Now, if they saw them alive and they have them alive, they can free them and we can forget about everything. But if they had them alive and they killed them in cold blood then it is on them (Maier 2001, 195).

As they blamed the state for the disappearances, part of Eureka's work was to fight for Amnesty Laws that would result in the release of the disappeared.

It was during the first congress of FEDEFAM in 1981 that relatives across the continent agreed to use the term detained-disappeared instead of just using the term 'disappeared'. This aimed at emphasising the fact that these crimes were planned. The point was to show that their relatives had not simply disappeared, vanished; with this term, relatives all across Latin America wanted to highlight that a planned detention had occurred for their relatives to be disappeared (Maier 2001, 45).

With the years, the category that has remained in Mexico for the Eureka Committee and other collectives (e.g. H.I.J.O.S.) is 'disappeared for political reasons' ('desaparecidos políticos'). This category emphasises the political motivation behind the detention and later disappearance of their loved ones. Eureka never denied their disappeared loved ones' political participation as other collectives elsewhere did. As I show below, this way of understanding disappearances in political terms created tensions between the relatives of the disappeared of the 1970s and those of the mid-2000s when, following international human rights frameworks in place, the latter used the term 'disappeared' to talk about their relatives. The category 'disappeared for political reasons' speaks of the agency and the motivation of the crime. By talking about the disappeared it highlights the implication of state actors, and by adding 'for political reasons' it also speaks of a context of politically motivated repression.

The way in which human rights violations are categorised is in itself a battle over memory, as their naming has implications on how the victims and the perpetrators are portrayed, and on how the state's role is understood. As I show in the following sections, different governments have responded to disappearances over time by creating public policies in which disappearances are described with different names, depending on the context, but typically by using categories that do not speak of the state's responsibility for the crimes. In their role as memory entrepreneurs and activists of memory, the relatives confront the responses given by the state, by creating and using ad hoc categories.

### **5.1.2 Government Responses to Disappearances (1970's-2000's)**

Whilst the relatives of the disappeared used categories that emphasised the state's responsibility in these crimes, the federal governments' public discourse did not fully acknowledge the disappearances. Since their foundation, Eureka met with state representatives. Nonetheless, the disappeared were not freed nor were their whereabouts revealed, and the crimes remained in impunity. Instead of freeing the disappeared, the government responded to the relatives' pressure on this matter with a public enquiry conducted by PGR, followed by the creation of two governmental institutions to address the problem: LOCATEL (Servicio Público de Localización Telefónica (Public Service of Telephonic Localisation) and the National Human Rights Commission, analysed below.

After the creation in 1977 of the committee of relatives of the disappeared, the issue received public attention. AI's reports show how the issue was becoming even more important to international human rights organisations and the role of the relatives in achieving this. According to *Proceso*, the first time AI mentioned Mexico in their report was in 1977-1978, and by 1982 there was a five-page section on Mexico in their annual report. In this document, AI addresses disappearances, torture, and extrajudicial killings in the country (Galarza 1982; R. Hernández 1982). As a result of this pressure, the head of the PGR, Oscar Flores Sánchez published a communiqué in a newspaper in 1978 denying the existence of the disappeared. In the context of the Pope's visit to Mexico in 1979, when

more international attention was put on the country, Flores Sánchez presented a report at a press conference (Castellanos 2007). As already noted, the Mexican government stressed its democratic nature and denied the crimes that were being committed by state actors. The report denied the existence of the disappeared, arguing that they were either fugitives or had died, but without presenting evidence. At the press conference, the Attorney General stated that there were no longer any people disappeared for political reasons, but rather unknown people (*desconocidos*), referring to people who had died and had been buried without having been identified. Today, these people would probably be referred to as disappeared, but this comment shows that in the late 1970s, thinking about disappeared persons meant thinking of them alive but in an unknown location. In this press conference, the Attorney General denied that Military Camp No.1 was used as a clandestine prison and that there were clandestine prisons in the country, that there were disappeared persons in the country, that detainees were tortured in the country, and that there were guerrillas still operating in Mexico (Cabildo and Hernández 1979; Reveles 1981). In this way, he denied all the claims that relatives of the disappeared had been making for years.

To a particular phenomenon of disappearances committed by state agents he replied with an example of 'missing' (not disappeared) people in the United States. Flores Sánchez stated that more than 150,000 people disappear every year in the United States and 'no one has come with the idea of demanding President Carter to return them (*que los presente*)' (Cabildo and Hernández 1979). The organised relatives of the disappeared were trying to bring attention to the cases of the disappeared who were held in clandestine state jails. The government, through the figure of the Attorney General, responded that there were no disappeared people to be liberated and that there was no repression in Mexico.

After this report, relatives continued to exercise pressure on the government, which responded with the creation of LOCATEL. LOCATEL was created in 1979 as a response to mounting pressure from civil society and to the international visibility of the disappearances taking place in the country. Urban guerrillas were still active in different parts of the country and the government continued to use enforced disappearances as a way to deal with political opponents. LOCATEL was created to deal with this issue, but with little real power to do so.

LOCATEL was created in September 1979 as an NGO to give information and help citizens find people 'missing' through a call centre ('LOCATEL' n.d.). The principle was that all detentions should be reported to LOCATEL, so in case of a detention, the family could call LOCATEL and they would locate their relatives. This did not take into account the fact that the majority of the detentions that led to disappearances were done clandestinely, so they would not be reported to LOCATEL or to any other official channel (although as I have argued, there are records of these detentions in intelligence archives). In 1980-1981, this agency, created to locate missing people, added to its functions an automobile-locating service and gradually started adding more services to its aims. In 1984, it lost its NGO status and formally became part of the Federal District's public administration thus losing the

supposed autonomy that it had before ('LOCATEL' n.d.; 'Manual Administrativo de Organización Dictamen 9 2007 Servicio Público de Localización Telefónica' 2007).

LOCATEL still exists and is useful for a variety of things, from getting information on bureaucratic procedures to getting health advice. Nonetheless, it has not helped as a means to find the disappeared. LOCATEL was then a governmental office supposedly created to deal with disappearances that could be shown to international partners, but that did not help families to find their disappeared relatives nor did it prevent new disappearances from taking place. An example of how LOCATEL was shown to international bodies as a step forward in tackling disappearances is the 1982 report elaborated by the UNWGEID, in which it described the Group's visit to Mexico and their view of LOCATEL. The Mexican government informed the Group that LOCATEL would centralise the information on detentions so the recurrence of disappearances would not be possible, which the Group saw as being in accordance with international recommendations (Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances 1982). The Group saw LOCATEL as a good step forward to prevent new disappearances taking place. Nonetheless, after LOCATEL's creation more disappearances were carried out and the service did not help in providing the whereabouts of the disappeared.

The word 'missing' is used throughout old and new LOCATEL documents. By contrast, the word 'disappeared' is absent. The office that was presented to organisations of relatives of the disappeared and to international human rights bodies did not actually have in its aims to deal with this particular issue. In this battle for memory between the relatives and the government, whilst the *Doñas* were demanding that the disappeared be set free, using categories such as disappeared, disappeared for political reasons, and kidnapped by the state, the government's response was to create a telephone service to find 'missing' (not disappeared) people. The context in which this institution was created may explain why it failed in dealing with enforced disappearances.

As Guerrero's Truth Commission report established, and as has been analysed by scholars, public institutions such as the PGR, the Ministry of Interior and the army possessed the information of the whereabouts of the disappeared and new disappearances could have been stopped from happening by the same institutions (Navarrete Gorjón et al. 2014; Aguayo 2001; Vicente Ovalle, n.d.). With the creation of LOCATEL, as with other policies like the announcement of the Amnesty Law in 1978, the narrative that was constructed was that of a federal government actively tackling the phenomenon of the disappeared. However, when analysing the 'silences' of these policies, or what they did not tackle, it is clear that they did not respond to the particularities of the enforced disappearances that relatives of the disappeared were denouncing. The Amnesty Law worked only for those detained in legal prisons, while LOCATEL responded to a logic of missing and not forcibly disappeared persons. With these policies, as with others taken by different governments the disappeared were further disappeared. The reason behind that seems to be the disposition of continuing with the practice of disappearances by state agents and the lack of willingness to reveal the whereabouts of the



disappeared, which could have implied an important political cost at the national and international level.

The creation by Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988-1994) in 1990 of the CNDH was the other main public response to disappearances in this period. This took place in the context of the signing of the National Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) between Mexico, the United States and Canada. The Commission was created as part of a process of modernisation and to portray Mexico as a responsible business partner. CNDH was also the result of pressure exerted by relatives of the disappeared ('Documentales Históricos | Comisión Nacional de Los Derechos Humanos - México' n.d.; Ramírez 1997; Correa 1992, 199). As with LOCATEL, the context in which the CNDH was created and the way in which disappearances were conceived by this institution sheds light on the battles its creation represented and helps analyse the shortcomings of its results.

A 'visitaduría' for 'presumed disappeared' persons ('presuntos desaparecidos') was created within CNDH. The use of the word *presunto* in the name of the visitaduría produced a strong response from the relatives of the disappeared. The complications of translating 'presunto' to English can help clarify the problems it brought up. In Spanish, 'presunto' might mean mainly two things in this context. On the one hand, it can be translated as *presumed*, that is 'supposed to be', implying that to be sure that someone had been disappeared there had to be an investigation that proved this to be the case. On the other hand, this word could be read as 'alleged', which implies doubt about the mere occurrence of this crime. Following CNDH documents published in English, I will translate *presunto* as *presumed*, but it is important to bear in mind the other meaning this word has in Spanish and to analyse the vagueness of the category and the implications that using that particular word had (CNDH 2012a).

Eureka was critical of the creation of the CNDH, which responded to national and international pressure. This committee had already reported disappearances to the PGR, Ministers of Interior and Presidents in several occasions. With the creation of CNDH, the federal government sent a message to the relatives about what to expect regarding their relatives. The CNDH can only elaborate reports on human rights violations and emit non-binding recommendations, but it lacks legal power to prosecute those responsible of committing the crimes. According to the visitaduría's description, its aim is to establish the whereabouts of disappeared persons, but in the field its actions have been much more modest and have served mainly to produce two main reports, analysed below, which instead of establishing the whereabouts of the disappeared have only centred in establishing if these were cases of disappearances or not (CNDH n.d.). Thus, the CNDH had less power to find the disappeared and to bring justice than previous instances with which relatives were already in dialogue. Nonetheless, as far as the narrative being created by the government is concerned, the CNDH was a step forward in terms of dealing with human rights violations and was going to help emit recommendations to government offices which would, in theory, tackle the issues highlighted by the commission.

However, the name of the *visitaduría* posed problems for the relatives of the disappeared. In a letter addressed to then President Salinas, *Doñas* from Chihuahua expressed their concern about the 'presumed disappeared' category.

The meeting (with CNDH personnel) took us to a path of mistrust and anguish (...) we felt a lack of respect to our struggle, to the search of our children that has taken us to obtain the acknowledgement from our people, for being conscious and consequent activists. All of this starts with a simple statement made by the Commission: 'presumed disappeared' as they call it on their working plan. (...) Why is the term 'presumed disappeared' being used, denying with it our reason and our legitimacy in defense of life and human rights in the country? (...) We ask for respect, both in words and in action, towards the main reason of our demand, of our struggle and our life. The real existence of the disappeared for political reasons (Comité pro defensa de presos, perseguidos, desaparecidos y exiliados políticos. Comité Eureka. Sección Chihuahua y Cd. Juárez 1990).

Similarly, and in the context of a *Proceso* investigation, relatives of the disappeared in Guerrero told the journalist 'that there are no 'presumed disappeared' people, but plainly disappeared, and that to prove this they offer their testimony' (Ramírez 1992b). As these words show, the way in which CNDH named its office for investigating these crimes revictimised relatives of the disappeared, because it cast doubt on the actual disappearance of these persons. This is a problem that continues to this date. According to information gathered through private correspondence with a member of the CNDH's Consultive Council, this Council has asked the national ombudsman to change the name of this *visitaduría*, as it is not in accordance with human rights language.

The CNDH elaborated a report as the result of its work regarding 'presumed disappeared' persons. The team working between 1990 and 1992 on the report included not only CNDH personnel, but also members of PGR and police officers. The report was a partial analysis of the phenomenon as it only included cases from Guerrero from between 1971 and 1974 and mainly from supporters of the Party of the Poor. The other cases presented by the relatives were not included.

The report posed several problems. More than trying to clarify the fate and whereabouts of the disappeared, or to find those responsible for the disappearances, it appeared to try to discredit the existence of the disappearances. According to the report, the 'presumed disappeared' were either dead - and therefore unlocatable and unidentifiable - or they were not even disappeared. The report states that for the dead identification would be complex because in the cases in which some 'excesses' (e.g. arbitrary detentions and extrajudicial killings) had been committed by individual members of public security forces or by guerrilla groups, the bodies had been disappeared through different methods such as incineration, throwing them from airplanes and helicopters or throwing them in the sea. According to this report, of 206 cases of presumed disappeared persons, 160 had died, 16 had been killed by their own guerrilla groups, 29 had been detained in an unknown location, 14 are very likely to be alive, and in 19 cases the information received was just too confusing (Castellanos 2007). The report acknowledged Oscar Flores' report from 1979 as one of the consulted sources and

followed a similar discursive line, denying that disappearances had taken place (Castellanos 2007, 315).

The report presented a discourse similar to the 'Two Demons Theory' popular in Argentina after the last dictatorship.<sup>78</sup> For CNDH there were two parties, the guerrilla and the 'public forces', both of which had committed excesses and were disconnected from society. According to the report, it was necessary to acknowledge that there had been confrontations between the armed forces and the guerrilla 'that should lead us to the objective conclusion, which should be accepted by society in general and by those directly involved in these events, which consists in acknowledging that during those years our country lived a sad armed period. (...) between two groups of Mexicans: the public forces and the Party of the Poor'. The report adds 'it would be healthy that the families of the presumed disappeared persons could reflect on the fact that their relatives participated in this guerrilla movement and that, of course, some of the hypotheses pointed out in this report could have happened' (CNDH n.d., 104). With this argument, the families were encouraged to accept the fate of their loved ones as a natural consequence of the political decisions they had made. The systematic use of enforced disappearances and their planned nature, later revealed, were not discussed in the report. The document seems to show without further evidence that the more than 200 cases of 'presumed disappeared' that were investigated were not in that condition. The government office in charge of addressing disappearances then presented a version of the events that asked the relatives' to accept the death of the disappeared, without investigating all the cases and without providing evidence of this fate. Moreover, it absolved the state of responsibility and framed the crimes as excesses committed by guerrillas and unknown state agents.

Relatives of the disappeared, international human rights organisations and survivors of state violence criticised the way in which the investigation for the 1992 report was carried out, affirming that the investigation was superficial and that basic questions such as the whereabouts of the victims had not been answered. After the publication in *Proceso* magazine of the results of the report, the CNDH sent a letter to that publication stating that the report was only provisional ('El Informe de Guerrero, 'Documento Provisional', Dice La CNDH' 1992; Ramírez 1992a; Correa 1992; Ramírez 1992b; La redacción 1992a, 1992b). The CNDH did not present a final version of the report.

Several human rights organisations have also criticised CNDH's work on disappearances. An example of this criticism is the report elaborated in 1997 by the Centro de Derechos Humanos 'Fray Francisco de Vitoria O.P.' and the CMDPDH. These organisations explain how regardless of having an area destined to 'presumed disappeared' persons the CNDH has not presented important outcomes. The way in which they investigate, mainly by sending requests to other government offices, which in turn deny their involvement in these crimes, is deficient. The cases are then closed and the relatives are advised to fill a report on kidnapping. According to this report, when there is an

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<sup>78</sup> For more on the Two Demons Theory, see: Crenzel 2008.

undeniable involvement of authorities, the victims are declared 'absent' and the investigation is carried out through the government offices for 'missing' persons. This means that the government's involvement in the disappearances is not acknowledged and enforced disappearances are not treated as such as they are conceived as a different phenomenon (Centro de Derechos Humanos "Fray de Vitoria O.P." A.C. and Comisión Mexicana para la Defensa y la Promoción de los Derechos Humanos A.C. 1997; Petrich 2001).

Further investigations would need to be carried out to establish the processes for this to happen and the motivations behind it. Nevertheless, it is important to analyse these governmental policies in context. As presented in chapter 3, the Mexican context in the 1960s-1980s was different to that of other countries in Latin America. Although the democratic character of the government may be questioned, Mexico held regular elections with civilian governments throughout those years. This was different to other countries in the region that had dictatorships (e.g. Uruguay, Brazil, Argentina, and Chile) or civil or internal wars (e.g. El Salvador, Peru, and Guatemala). Besides the extent of the state violence, this had an impact on the measures taken regarding that violence. In many of those other countries, after the end of the dictatorships or the wars, the new governments carried out a variety of transitional justice measures (truth commissions, trials, exhumations, reparations, etc.). In Mexico, the PRI remained in power for 71 years, which meant that those carrying out measures to deal with the disappeared were members of the same party that committed the disappearances in the first place. As shown before, the PRI governments portrayed themselves as democratic governments who respected human rights and were even willing to receive exiles from other countries of the region. To follow this grand narrative, state actors denied disappearances and with this, impunity was granted.

Both CNDH and LOCATEL have been useful for things other than dealing with disappearances, but did not work to stop or investigate them, to disclose the whereabouts of the disappeared or bring justice for these cases because since their inception they had limitations for doing so. If there had been a political will to stop disappearances, other measures would have proven more effective, for example creating a prosecutor's office that could analyse the cases, investigate those actors and institutions accused of being responsible of the crimes, and visit the clandestine jails to find evidence, etc. To prevent new disappearances from happening, this institution could have disbanded the paramilitary groups and prosecuted police and army agents responsible of disappearances, as well as those public servants who coordinated them. Nonetheless, these measures were unlikely in a context in which disappearances were still a state practice in the 1970s and 1980s, when LOCATEL was created, and when those who had committed the disappearances were still part of state structures in the 1990s, as happened when the CNDH was formed. Even if there probably was no political will to solve the cases of the disappeared, national and international pressure on this topic pushed different governments to take some measures against these crimes.

Although this context changed after the 2000 elections, when a PAN candidate won the presidency for the first time, the CNDH's work on disappearances did not suffer a radical change. As I show

below, the language used in the report and the rationale behind it were different, but the CNDH's report was part of a series of transitional justice measures taken by the new government, which ultimately perpetuated the lack of truth and the impunity on these cases.

In 2001, the CNDH presented –this time publicly– a second report on disappeared persons. While this report talked about enforced disappearances, not 'presumed disappeared' persons and while the scope of the report was wider, integrating Eureka's full list, the document gives the impression, again, of trying to dismiss the existence of forcibly disappeared persons or at least to diminish the problem of enforced disappearances in Mexico. The report was based on files already in possession of the Mexican authorities, particularly those in hands of the CNDH since 1990 that had previously formed part of the Human Rights General Direction within the Ministry of Interior. The report was criticised by relatives of the disappeared. The Eureka committee criticised the report for not revealing the whereabouts of the disappeared and for just reusing information the committee had provided the CNDH more than a decade before. AFADEM, another organisation of relatives of the disappeared, was also critical of the report for only analysing the cases presented by Eureka when AFADEM has records of more than 800 disappeared persons only in Guerrero. Of the 532 cases included in the report, 275 were proven to be forcibly disappeared persons, in another 97 cases some evidence of state participation was found, and the CNDH could not reach a conclusion on the 160 remaining cases (Acosta and Ennelin 2006, 102; CNDH 2001).

Even though the second CNDH report did not help in revealing the whereabouts of the disappeared nor in bringing justice to these cases, the discourse is different to that of the 1992 report. As I show in chapter 3, this second report was launched in a transitional period in which the PAN came to power after 71 years of PRI government at the federal level. The CNDH was then instructed by President Fox to produce a report on the disappeared as part of this transition and of dealing with politically motivated crimes committed in previous decades. In 2001 and only months before the launch of the CNDH report, Mexico signed the Inter American Convention on Forced Disappearance of Persons, which had not been signed by past governments. In addition to that, the crime of enforced disappearance was added to the Federal Criminal Code (Código Penal Federal), although the definition was not in strict accordance with international standards as it did not include the commission of the crime by private actors with the authorisation, support or acquiescence of the state (L. S. Castillo 2003). The report then reflects this transitional context and the changes in terms of the national and international legal framework. The report not only does not contain the 'Two Demons' theory anymore, but it also establishes that: '(t)here is no national security reason that can justify enforced disappearances. There is no state reason that can be above the rule of law' (CNDH 2001, 1). The report states that enforced disappearances are an example of the authoritarian responses to a political problem. The recommendation to relatives to take into account what their loved ones had done and to understand that what happened might have been a consequence of that, which was found in the previous CNDH report, was replaced by a human rights discourse. The report also acknowledges the damage to the relatives and to society caused by disappearances, in accordance

to international legal documents. Besides this, the report highlights the lack of investigation of these crimes, which resulted in impunity and the denial of the right to the truth (CNDH 2001).

Even though the report recognises the state's responsibility and some of the disappearances are called disappearances (not presumed disappearances), there were no further consequences of that acknowledgement, particularly in terms of justice, reparation, and of disclosing the whereabouts of the disappeared because, as explained above, that is beyond the CNDH's mandate. The names of the perpetrators were not included in the document, but were given to the President during the public launch of the report (Acosta and Ennelin 2006; CNDH 2001). This report served as a basis for FEMOSPP's work so it was a first step in the flawed transitional process analysed in chapter 3.

Both with the creation of LOCATEL and with the CNDH's first report, what disappearances are called reflects the government's position towards them and the willingness of continuing the construction of a grand narrative portraying the Mexican government as a democratic government committed to the protection of human rights. Launching a centralised call centre to locate 'missing' persons in 1979 in response to the demands by the relatives of the disappeared, and creating an office specialised in human rights in which the treatment of the disappeared was to see them as victims of a 'presumably' committed crime denied in fact the existence of the disappeared and perpetrated impunity to the perpetrators. However, by creating those offices the governments were able to show that they were taking actions in this regard, which complemented its narrative. As I show in following sections, this has been the case with policies created in the context of disappearances after the mid-2000s, too.

## **5.2 Naming the Absence: The Disappeared in the Context of the so-called 'War on Drugs'**

### **5.2.1 Naming a New Absence: From the 'Levantadxs' to the 'Desaparecidxs'**

After the declaration of the so-called 'War on Drugs' in 2006, killings and disappearances increased greatly in the country.<sup>79</sup> For Calderón's government, there were two kinds of victims: the guilty ones, who deserved what happened to them, and the innocent ones, or 'collateral damage' who were in the wrong place at the wrong time in a war against a bigger evil for the good of society. Calderón himself affirmed that 90% of the victims were involved in something in a speech quoted by Schedler, and that this was the reason they suffered that destiny (Schedler 2015, 61). The other 10% he claimed to be members of the government killed by criminals and innocent citizens.

In this context, the Movement for Peace with Justice and Dignity (MPJyD) achieved an important milestone in how the victims were portrayed. The irruption of the relatives of the victims into the public

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<sup>79</sup> See Chapter 3 for a broader context of this period.

space, with their stories replicated across the country, helped to shift the discourse that framed the disappeared as collateral damage to a discourse that focused on them as victims (Gallagher 2013). While the relatives of the victims insisted that the 'War on Drugs' had a negative impact and that the presence of the armed forces was bringing violence to different states, former President Calderón expressed that such violence was not the result of the armed forces carrying out police tasks, but that their deployment was the consequence of violence and unfortunately some people had been caught in this fight (Montalvo 2011). The deaths and disappearances were made part of a rhetoric of war contested by the relatives of the victims. In this, the lives of the dead or disappeared are seen as precarious lives, lives that do not deserve to be mourned.<sup>80</sup> The shift to speaking about victims denoted an acknowledgement from state actors of the state's responsibility to its citizens, and served as the basis for a protection framework for this group. Important outcomes of this process were the sanction of the Victims' Law (Ley de Víctimas) and the creation of the Executive Commission for the Attention of Victims (Comisión Ejecutiva de Atención a Víctimas).

Nonetheless, the category of victims was a big umbrella for many other categories. One of the crimes within the category of victims is that of victims of disappearances. Gatti affirms: 'Among the victims, the subset of detained-disappeared is well situated, occupying the highest ranks in the contemporary "hierarchy of misfortune" (Agier 2011, 213) Not surprisingly, as the detained-disappeared is a nonliving, a non-dead, a noncitizen, expelled from history, nameless and bodiless. It is humanity falling short. (...) A complete victim' (Gatti 2014, 165). While the media and the state actors' discourses pointed to the culpability of the victims and called the disappeared 'levantadx', relatives of these victims and some human rights organisations started using the category 'disappeared', inserting them in an international human rights discourse. The verb 'levantar' means 'to lift', but can also be translated as 'taken'. This word is part of a broader language to describe crimes presumably related to organised crime, and has some implications that go beyond the literal meaning of the word. The term 'levantón' denoted a kidnapping in which the aim was not an economic reward. The implication of this was that 'levantada' or kidnapped people were somehow involved with organised crime and this was the reason for their 'levantón' (Reveles 2012b, 23). Along with 'levantones', a whole new vocabulary was born and became colloquial: 'ejecutadx' instead of killed, 'colgadx', for when someone is killed and left hanging, usually from a bridge, 'encajueladx' for when a killed person is left in a car's trunk, 'encobijadx', for when someone is killed and left in public wrapped up in a blanket (cobija), and the list is long. These terms stressed the idea –many times without any proof- of the involvement of the victims with organised crime ('El Narco 'Infiltra' El Lenguaje' n.d.). In many cases, the authorities and then the press still automatically assume that if someone has been killed or disappeared it must be because of their implication with illicit activities, so then they refer to those victims as 'ejecutadx' or 'levantadx'. In January 2016, 17 persons were taken from a party in the municipality of Arcelia, Guerrero. The authorities of the state, particularly the Governor, and the media reported this case as

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<sup>80</sup> In a similar way, Edkins shows how after 9/11 Bush's administration used the memorialisation of deaths as a part of a war discourse (Edkins 2003, 246).

a case of 'levantados'. Examples like this can be regularly found in the local and national press ('Comando Levanta a 20 Personas En Arcelia, Guerrero' n.d.; Ocampo Arista 2016a).

José Reveles writes:

*Levantón* is an ignoble, offensive, rude, arbitrary term, because it discriminates, ignores, discards and helps to blur even more those who were already disappeared. But above all, it hides the true meaning of the crime. The *levantón* does not exist in any known penal code, and thus it is not classified as an illegal action (Reveles 2012b, 23).

The category 'levantón' is used to criminalise the victims and to normalise the human rights violations they suffer, as well as to ostracise the relatives of these victims in their efforts to achieve truth and justice (Saldívar Arreola and Rodríguez Sánchez 2015; *International Wire* 2010; Michael 2013; Rojas-Sotelo 2014; Schack 2014; Reveles 2012a). The relatives are using the word 'levantón' less and less to talk about their loved ones.

Back in 2011, in meetings with relatives of the disappeared who were participating in different collectives (many of them of recent creation), relatives did refer to their relatives as 'levantadxs' and wondered if the category 'disappeared' applied to what had happened to their relatives. The relatives have constructed their discourse using the category 'disappeared' instead of 'levantadx' following a complex process of engagement with human rights organisations and in dialogue with the government. According to conversations with relatives of the disappeared that have taken place since then, their strategy was formed as a result of the processes discussed in chapter 4: as I showed, the relatives are constantly learning, getting to know other relatives from other parts of the country and from other countries, attending training on different issues on disappearances (forensics, psychosocial support, etc.), the constant dialogue with national and international human rights bodies and with the government, and especially the accompaniment of human rights organisations. Contrary to the ostracising that the category 'levantón' brought with it, the word 'disappeared' allows them to insert their struggle into an international human rights framework.

During the interviews carried out for this research in 2015, the interviewees did not use the word 'levantón' or 'levantadx' but 'desaparecidx' when talking about their relatives. Nonetheless, it seemed that this difference was not so clear to them. Virginia Barajas (FUNDEM) said: 'I think that when they take (levantan) people they eventually return them, it is as if they took them by mistake (...) and disappeared is a more serious thing' (Barajas E. 2015). Oscar Flores (FUNDEM), affirmed: 'I do not agree with either of those two words. Levantado is (...) as if someone lifts an object just because, and disappeared, disappearance means that something is not there, it is disappeared, as if it had vanished' (Flores Coronado 2015). Lourdes Valdivia (FUUNDEM) affirmed:

Maybe for someone *levantado* they ask for a ransom because they have them to negotiate (...). For me, disappearance is that they were taken away and we do not know about them, we do not know anything. Once, my



husband's uncle made the comment 'the boys are lost'. And I told him 'no, they are not lost because they are not stupid enough as to not being able to come back to where they live, or where they are from, the difference is that they were disappeared' (Valdivia Hernández 2015).

Luisa Muñoz, one of the relatives accompanied by CEDEHM, explains that when someone is *levantadx*, they are then found dead, but with the disappeared they simply do not know where they are and they are not found, dead or alive (Muñoz González and Romo Salas 2015). For the relatives interviewed for this thesis, the word '*levantadx*' does not seem to be necessarily related to organised crime, but its specificity has more to do with the characteristics of the situation: '*levantadx*' is someone for whom a ransom is asked, or someone who after being kidnapped turns up dead. What seems to be somewhat clear is that there is a difference between their disappeared relatives and the '*levantadx*s', even though what precisely the difference is may not be clear. Ángeles López, from the Victoria Díez Human Rights Centre, agreed that whether the relatives refer to their loved ones as *levantadx*s or as *desaparecidxs* changes when they start working on their cases with human rights organisations, as they adopt a more specialised language (López García 2015).

In this shift in how the relatives of the disappeared of the mid-2000s call their loved ones, there was a period of tension between them and some organisations of relatives of the disappeared of the first period and human rights NGOs. While the relatives of the disappeared of the 1960s-1980s understood that their relatives were disappeared due to political reasons and that the state was responsible for this crime, the causes of and those responsible for the disappearances of the mid-2000s onwards were harder to understand at first. There does not seem to be a political motivation behind the majority of these disappearances and the implication of the state is sometimes unclear, so for the relatives of past decades and for human rights organisations these crimes were not the same as those that the political dissidents of the 1960s onwards had been victims of. As has been shown in chapter 2, the category disappeared was the result of the work of relatives and of human rights organisations who were trying to understand, describe, and put a stop to a new crime with clear characteristics. Thus, the fact that other relatives had started using that same category for a phenomenon that did not fit with the previous one generated some conflict.

Blanca Martínez (FJdL) related how in 2010-2011 there was a dispute in terms of trying to understand the phenomenon and naming it correctly in order to make the pertinent legal demands to the state. The Director of the FJdL, which accompanies the work of FUUNDEC-M narrated how collectives of relatives of people disappeared from the mid-2000s onwards encountered some resistance from different groups when framing the crimes they were representing as disappearances (B. Martínez 2015). For these new organisations it was critically important to frame their cases as disappearances. As Gatti explains for other cases of disappearances elsewhere, to be able to insert their realities in a human rights discourse helps to understand and give meaning to the disappearances (Gatti 2014). Moreover, it allowed them to enter a dialogue with different levels of the state in a stronger position,

which can be described as a shift from being treated as relatives of people involved in organised crime, to being relatives of victims of human rights violations.

It is likely that many factors contributed to the reluctance of the 'older' organisations to acknowledge these new crimes as disappearances, namely how these crimes were portrayed in the media as a problem within organised crime, the lack of a political motivation, and the complication of understanding who the agents of the crime were. This led to a battle over the meanings of the disappearances and over who were the authorised voices in this topic. Two groups of what Jelin defines as memory entrepreneurs competed to install their discourse on what disappearances were and what needed to be done in order to address them (Jelin 2003b).

It took a process - facilitated by organisations such as SERAPAZ- that led to comprehend the more recent events and understand that the two periods had different characteristics but that the results at the individual and collective level and the ways in which the government was responding were similar for the relatives of the two periods to work together. In this process, international figures such as psychosocial expert Carlos Beristain and Chilean lawyer Roberto Garretón played key roles, as they helped to frame the disappearances in a wider context, sharing experiences from elsewhere. Nonetheless, as I argue in this thesis, in many cases the relatives of the disappeared whose cases have more public prominence have not incorporated the history of disappearances more broadly in their discourse, which suggests a remaining division between these periods which can be related to a lack of knowledge on the previous disappearances or to a comprehension of the cases as different.

The relatives of the disappeared of the second period adopted the use of a human rights language, which places the responsibility for disappearances on the state, and have demanded that the different local and federal governments be accountable for those responsibilities. In the next section I analyse the government's position in relation to such demands, and point to some of the different responses it has given to this issue, and how, as happened in the first period, the responses have been inadequate to effectively tackle disappearances.

### **5.2.2 The Government's Discourse and the so-called 'War on Drugs': 'Missing' and 'Not Found' People**

As in the first period, the federal governments have also developed a set of responses regarding disappearances during the second period. Nonetheless, these responses have failed in effectively tackling this crime. As I show below, in this period the different governments have failed in properly defining and measuring disappearances, which impacts on the public policies created to deal with them. I argue that the absence of appropriate responses to disappearances is a consequence of a combination of a lack of political will and an inefficient infrastructure at the local and federal levels.

During the examination of Mexico by the UNCED in 2015, one of the main questions was how many people had been forcibly disappeared. The Mexican delegation was not able to answer this question. Back in 2011, when the UNWGEID visited Mexico, one of the recommendations to the Mexican state was to create a registry for disappeared people: 'statistical data should be compiled, disaggregated by sex, age, location and the authorities presumably involved, on enforced disappearances in order to implement policies relating to prevention, eradication, investigations, penalties and reparation' (United Nations 2011). In 2018, Mexico still does not have these fundamental statistics. As the Open Society Foundation Justice Initiative asserts '(d)espite the existence of relevant institutions and formal means of data accessibility, the weakness of government efforts to produce and collate data on atrocity crimes makes any attempt to understand the scope of the crisis difficult, and in some respects impossible' (Open Society Justice Initiative 2016b, 38).

According to national and international human rights organisations, having reliable data on the different cases of disappearances and acknowledging the extent of the problem would be the first steps for combating this crisis (United Nations 2011). Different state actors have produced and shared data on missing or not found people. Nonetheless, these figures fail in distinguishing disappearances and enforced disappearances from each other, and both from other cases of people who are absent for different reasons. As previously stated, this prevents state actors of developing appropriate public policies. But as I argue here, using inaccurate definitions and categories seem to serve different governments in advancing a discourse that highlights the ways in which the government is dealing with this problematic whilst minimising it and diminishing the role of state actors in the commission and later treatment of the crime.

Since 2011, the number of 'not found' people ('no localizadas') have been public in Mexico. In November 2012, two days before Peña Nieto came to power, the *Washington Post* reported the receipt of a list with more than 25,000 names of people 'not found' in the country. Shortly after, in December 2012, a new list with 20,851 names of people 'not found' between 2006 and 2012 was leaked to the *L.A. Times* and made public by Propuesta Cívica (a Mexican NGO led by Professor Sergio Aguayo). After this, government officials have reported different lists and greatly fluctuating numbers. From 27,523 persons 'not found' from 2006-2012 in February 2017, to 26,121 'not found' in the same period a few days later, then to 24,800 'not found' in May 2014 and 13,195 persons and 8,000 'not found' on that same month. By June 2014, the number was 16,000 persons 'not found' between 2006 and 2014. In August 2014, the number of people reported as 'not found' between 2006 and 2014 was 22,322. For July 2015, 26,588 persons were reported as 'not found' and by June 2018 the figure was set at 37,435 (Booth 2012; 'Organización Civil Publica Base de Datos Sobre Personas Desaparecidas' 2012; Aristegui Noticias 2013; La Silla Rota 2013; FUUNDEC n.d.; *La Jornada* 2014a; Ballinas and Becerril 2014; Torres 2014; Muñoz 2014; F. Martínez 2014, 31, 2018).

Following the recommendation by the UNWGEID and the reports of lists of 'people not found' in international newspapers, the federal government created the National Registry on Disappeared or Lost Persons (Registro Nacional de Datos de Personas Extraviadas o Desaparecidas) in April 2012. The government has presented this registry at the international level as a first step to deal with disappearances, by understanding the nature of the problem in order to be able to create adequate measures to deal with it. Nonetheless, the registry does not directly deal with disappearances. In the Law for the National Registry, two categories are defined: disappeared and lost (persona extraviada). These are defined as follows:

Lost person. The person that for circumstances beyond their will does not know or does not remember their filiation, identity, and address data. (...)  
Disappeared person. Person that, based on reliable information of relatives, close or related to them have reported them as disappeared in conformity with the internal legislation, which can be related with an international or not international armed conflict, a situation of violence or internal disturbances, a natural disaster or any situation which might require the intervention of a competent public authority ('DOF - Diario Oficial de La Federación. Decreto Por El Que Se Expide La Ley Del Registro Nacional de Datos de Personas Extraviadas o Desaparecidas' 2012).

The registry does not distinguish enforced disappearances from disappearances that occurred in other circumstances, and lost and disappeared persons are all in the same list. Moreover, on the registry's webpage and many times in state officials' discourses, a third category is used: 'no localizadas' (not found), which does not differentiate disappeared from lost. Government officials have stressed that the registry does not give information on *why* the person is 'not found'.

Human rights organisations have pointed out the following issues with the registry. First, the impossibility of establishing patterns and understanding disappearances due to the lack of statistical information on enforced disappearances. Second, there is an issue in terms of the exclusion of cases of disappearances from the registry. As with all disappearances, there is the problem of underreporting. According to INEGI, in 2013 93.8% of the crimes were not reported, while in 2014 the figure is 92.8% (Amnesty International 2016b, 11). Besides this, there is a problem of conceptualisation, as authorities investigate many of the disappearances as kidnappings, therefore the crime committed is different to the one prosecuted. And, as the Registro Nacional does not include kidnappings, those disappearances prosecuted as kidnappings are excluded from it. Moreover, many of the cases reported by the organisations are not included in the registry (Fuerzas Unidas por Nuestros desaparecidos en México et al. 2014). In this same regard, the disappearances that occurred during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s are not included either. Third, the list does not include information on investigation and law enforcement.

Fourth, there is no information on the methodology used to find the people on the list, or on the legal outcome of the cases. In many cases the lists are refined only by making phone calls from the Procuradurías to the numbers found on the reports. In a press conference in 2013, Attorney General

Murillo Karam explained this and stated he himself had conducted one of these phone calls. The examples given for people reported as disappeared but who have returned are cases of lost or absent people not cases of enforced disappearances. Murillo Karam recounts one of the phone calls: 'no, look, my uncle is back, he had gone to buy cigarettes and took a while longer than he usually does, but he is back'. By giving these examples, the Attorney General shows how different situations are on the same list and how the response given is not adequate for disappearances or enforced disappearances. This has also been analysed by journalists such as Darwin Franco. Franco has called attention on how by giving these examples of people who have been found, the deeper problematic of enforced disappearances is minimised (CNN México 2014; Franco 2015).

The fifth problem with the list is one of its biggest pitfalls: the opacity with which the list is altered. There is no information about the methodology used to update the list, so the fluctuations in it cannot be monitored. In this regard, FUNDAR declares: 'without clarity and transparency, without information and truth about what happened and also without punishment for the guilty, the mere numbers are not relevant' (Antillón 2014).

Summing up, the Registry measures a mix of phenomena very inefficiently. Having a Registry to measure disappearances that does not work for that purpose would seem to be counterproductive. Nonetheless, the Registry's creation and the figures it creates serve a bigger discourse used by state actors, which acknowledges disappearances, but minimises the state's role in them and produces ineffective public policies to tackle them. It is hard to know if the use of these categories was a deliberate decision, but the lack of alteration of the categories and the absence of transparency on its operation despite repeated critical feedback speaks to a lack of political will to obtain realistic data on disappearances and enforced disappearances.

An example of the usefulness of the ambiguity of the RNPED for the government occurred in 2016, when AI launched its report on disappearances in Mexico. The organisation used figures from the Registry to talk about disappearances. The Under Secretary of Human Rights of the Ministry of Interior responded publicly to this report by saying that those figures reflected 'not found' persons rather than victims of disappearances or enforced disappearances. As a consequence, AI should refrain from using them to illustrate either of those phenomena ('Movimiento Por Nuestros Desaparecidos En México Acusa Trato Indolente de Segob' n.d.). Nonetheless, the Mexican delegation had presented the Registry to the UNCED only a few months earlier as a tool 'to organise and concentrate the information in an online database on lost or disappeared persons' ('Informe Del Estado Mexicano Sobre La Convención Internacional Para La Protección de Todas Las Personas Contra Las Desapariciones Forzadas' 2014, 51). Thus, the federal government presented the Registry to the UNCED as a step towards understanding and managing disappearances and then denied its figures when AI used them to portray the crisis of disappearances.

As has been suggested by human rights organisations, this lack of accurate figures on disappearances and enforced disappearances can be due to the fact that talking about lost or not found people has a lower political cost for the Mexican state than talking about disappearances and enforced disappearances. As I have explained, the first two categories do not focus the attention towards the state's responsibility and to the unfulfillment of Mexico's international responsibilities regarding enforced disappearances, as disappearances and enforced disappearances would. Acknowledging the large scale of the disappearances and the widespread nature of these crimes would require strong governmental action against all the instances implicated in the disappearances (Fuerzas Unidas por Nuestros desaparecidos en México et al. 2014). As Robledo argues, the lack of numbers represents a symbolic dispute over the importance and magnitude of the problem (Robledo Silvestre 2012, 70).

The problems with how disappearances are conceptualised impact the way in which they are dealt with. Even though the Registry does not differentiate between enforced disappearances and other crimes, it does divide the cases into two categories, which have a direct implication on public policy. The first category, the 'fuero federal' (federal jurisdiction) cases register likely disappearances and enforced disappearances being investigated by federal authorities. According to the Registry, up to September 2017, 1,201 cases fit in this category, so even if all the federal jurisdiction cases were enforced disappearances, this would only be around 1,200 cases. The other tens of thousands of cases of the 'fuero común' (ordinary crimes) dealt with by local authorities are defined as likely disappearances, but not enforced disappearances (RNPED n.d.). The public policies created by the federal government and announced as a way to deal with disappearances have been directed only to the federal jurisdiction crimes, and not to the tens of thousands included in the RNPED.

Among these policies, the creation of a Search Unit that was later converted into a Special Prosecutor's Office help to illustrate how the federal government repeatedly creates institutions supposedly designed to tackle disappearances, but which are undermined, from the start, by clear shortcomings. The Unidad Especializada de Búsqueda de Personas Desaparecidas (Special Unit for the Search of Disappeared Persons) was established in June 2013 ('DOF - Diario Oficial de La Federación: Acuerdo Por El Que Se Crea La Unidad Especializada de Búsqueda de Personas Desaparecidas y Se Establecen Sus Facultades' 2013) and the Fiscalía Especializada de Búsqueda de Personas Desaparecidas (Special Prosecutor's Office for the Search of Disappeared Persons) was created in 2015 ('DOF - Diario Oficial de La Federación. Acuerdo Por El Que Se Crea La Fiscalía Especializada de Búsqueda de Personas Desaparecidas, y Se Establecen Sus Facultades y Organización' 2015). These public agencies were created as a result of national and international pressure to deal with the disappearance crisis. Nonetheless, as with the Registry, they have not been effective in doing this, which may reflect, as happened in the first period of disappearances, the limitations that characterised them from the moment they were created. The Special Unit had only twelve members of staff and a small budget, when according to Attorney General Murillo Karam, its scope was to work on the search of all the persons 'not found' in the country (Angel n.d.). Even if they

meant to deal with the disappearances at the federal level, the infrastructure and personnel were not enough to conduct their activities.

After the public outrage following the enforced disappearances of 43 Ayotzinapa students, President Peña Nieto announced a new institution to address disappearances: the Special Prosecutor's Office for the Search of Disappeared Persons. Although it was announced as a new policy to deal with the disappearances, this was only a name swap for the Search Unit, as the capacities, scope, aims and staff of the two offices remained the same (Angel 2015). Moreover, the budget for the Search Unit and the Special Prosecutor's Office has constantly decreased over the years. Once more, the federal government responded with the creation of institutions to deal with disappearances, but without providing them with a real infrastructure to find the disappeared or to bring justice for the cases. To the specific demand of the parents of the 43 Ayotzinapa students of creating a special prosecutor's office to deal with that case, the response was to 'create' a new institution, which is actually the same institution that already existed and was not working.

Besides the problems with conceptualising and measuring disappearances, and the resulting flawed policies on this matter, another part in the battles on how meanings are created and on the history that is being created has to do with how disappearances are prosecuted. Across the country, MPs (public prosecutors) use different crimes such as homicide, deprivation of liberty, abuse of authority and kidnapping to prosecute what should be prosecuted as enforced disappearances, separating the state from the responsibility of the crimes (IDHEAS n.d.). This continues to be a problem even though the number of states that criminalise enforced disappearances has greatly increased as a result of the work of human rights and relatives' organisations, and the persistence of international human rights NGOs along with the recommendations made by the UNWGEID. In 2011, eight out of 32 states criminalised enforced disappearances (Human Rights Watch 2011). In 2014, the figure increased to 19 ('Informe Del Estado Mexicano Sobre La Convención Internacional Para La Protección de Todas Las Personas Contra Las Desapariciones Forzadas' 2014), and in July 2015, to 27 (RNPED n.d.). The first problem with this is that the majority of the states in which enforced disappearances are recognised as a crime do not comply with international standards (Committee on Enforced Disappearances 2015). But the second problem is that even though disappearances are a crime under state legislation, they are not prosecuted as such. A clear example of this is the case of the 43 Ayotzinapa students, in which more than 100 persons have been detained but are being prosecuted under deprivation of liberty instead of enforced disappearances, when there is enough evidence to prove the implication of state agents in these crimes (Amnesty International 2016b, 36).

As Lourdes Herrera (FUUNDEC) puts it, when talking to public servants about her relatives' case, they do use the word 'desaparecidos', but in written documents they use the category 'illegal deprivation of liberty' (Herrera del Llano 2015). Lourdes Hernández (Justicia para Nuestras Hijas) also speaks of how disappearances are dealt with under different crimes. 'My daughter's case is not in an office for enforced disappearance, but simply absent and missing people. (...) we fought for it not to

be treated as absent and missing, but as a disappearance which it is. (...) in my daughter's case there are police officers and military personnel involved; it is obvious that it is an enforced disappearance!' (Hernández Alarcón 2015) The implication of using different legal terms is that they change the agent of the disappearance and the duration of the crime. On the one hand, when treating disappearances as a different crime, the responsibility of state agents is diluted, which has a direct impact in the investigations and on the likelihood that the authorities will solve the crimes. As the testimony of Lourdes Hernández implies, treating her daughter's case -involving police and military personnel- as a case of missing or absent persons prevents the truth to be known and justice to be brought to the case, as the main people responsible of committing the crime are not investigated. On the other hand, using different crimes to deal with enforced disappearances impacts on the conception of the duration of the crime. Enforced disappearances are defined as continuous crimes, so as long as the whereabouts of the victim are not established the crime is being committed every day, contrary to what happens with kidnappings and illegal deprivations of liberty in which legally the crime is committed only at a certain point in time (Mastrogiovanni 2014, 31).

According to human rights organisations and to testimonies of relatives of the disappeared, public prosecutors across the country are reluctant to open investigations for enforced disappearances regardless of the amount of initial evidence to support that this is actually the crime that has been committed. The cause of this denial cannot be established without further investigation, but a hypothesis for this may be the lack of resources to investigate disappearances, the fear of reprisal for doing so, and the collusion of MPs with those responsible of committing disappearances, which can take place at every level of the state structure. As has been reported by international human rights organisation and bodies, the Mexican state in its different levels has failed to investigate disappearances. At the public prosecutors' level, the main action is to send official letters (oficios) to different institutions and to wait for and sometimes even demand that relatives of the disappeared carry out the investigations (Human Rights Watch 2013b, 2014a; Amnesty International 2015). For national human rights organisations, the lack of due diligence is a behaviour intentionally directed to avoid that the disappeared are found, and the perpetrators identified and punished. For these organisations, the way in which investigations are carried out actually guarantees impunity and protects private citizens and public servants (Fuerzas Unidas por Nuestros desaparecidos en México et al. 2014, 18). For FUNDENL, regardless of the reasons behind this widespread attitude, by not investigating disappearances diligently and adequately, the state fails to comply with the obligations acquired when it signed the International Convention. Moreover, the lack of investigation contributes to the commission of new disappearances and constitutes torture for the relatives of the disappeared (Fuerzas Unidas por Nuestros desaparecidos en México et al. 2014; Human Rights Watch 2013b).

There are then, two levels to the responses of the state. One of them is the discourse of commitment to human rights, and the responses to disappearances: the creation of a registry, the creation of offices to deal with disappearances, and the inclusion of enforced disappearances in the local codes. All of this can be presented at the national and international level as progress in dealing with



disappearances. But on the other level, the way in which different state actors deal with disappearances perpetuates a discourse in which disappearances are minimised (by not having reliable figures on these crimes, and by mixing them with other phenomena), and ultimately blamed on organised crime or on private agents, by prosecuting them as crimes in which the responsibility of state actors is not investigated.

It would be necessary to carry out an in depth investigation to see exactly at what level the problems to deal with disappearances happen and how much of that results from a failure of the structure and how much from a lack of political will. There is no such information available at this moment at the federal level, but an investigation carried out in Coahuila can shed light on these processes. As part of the recommendations of the GAT (Autonomous Working Group; described in chapter 4), a group of international experts analysed the processes to deal with disappearances at the Prosecutor's Office of Disappeared Persons of Coahuila. The report gives an account of the conditions that explain the failure (i) to find the disappeared, (ii) to hold those responsible accountable and (iii) to create the conditions to prevent new disappearances. The report describes the lack of an adequate profile in the people working at the Prosecutor's Office, the bad quality of the infrastructure they work with, the lack of institutional support to those prosecutors working on cases of enforced disappearances, the widespread use of torture in the investigation process, the corruption at all levels, and the lack of systematisation of information.

The report describes the lack of political will at the state level, which is reflected in the limited budget, staffing and administrative and logistic resources. It describes the lack of good working conditions and adequate training for personnel, as well as the lack of space to safely guard evidence. It analyses the lack of a chain of custody, the lack of registries on bodies, human remains, and bone fragments. According to the report, 90% of the search actions are mainly official letters sent to different institutions. The report highlights the deficiency in articulation between different public servants, which could help understand patterns in the *modus operandi* of the people responsible of committing disappearances. It shows that the budget is too low to comprehensively compensate relatives of the victims. Moreover, the report shows the lack of protection to witnesses, relatives of the victims and human rights defenders. The report concludes that there is not a real search for the disappeared, and that, in effect, the collectives of relatives are made responsible for the search of their loved ones; families have to provide lines of inquiry and evidence. Besides this, state actors keep on investigating organised crime as the only perpetrator of disappearances even in the cases where there is enough evidence of the involvement of the state (Luna Prada, Rodríguez Contreras, and Vélez Gutiérrez 2018).

As the report illustrates, this is a complex issue with many factors involved. Nonetheless, as the report also shows, no factor is working as intended. The report highlights the lack of political will to work, which has also been described by human rights organisations and institutions such as Amnesty International and the IACHR (OAS 2016a; Amnesty International 2015). The lack of political will is

common to both periods of disappearances, although it is likely that its causes and implications are different. During the first period state actors committed enforced disappearances mainly for political reasons. As I have argued before, the lack of investigation of those disappearances is probably related to the permanence in power of the party that was in government when they occurred, as well as to an impunity pact with other parties (mainly PAN). In this second period, disappearances are committed following an economic and sometimes territorial logic. In this regard, the lack of political will to address the crisis of disappearances is likely to reflect the simultaneous influence of the following factors. Firstly, according to different investigations, at least some of the disappearances have been committed by state actors, which makes the Mexican state responsible according to international law. Acknowledging the existence of thousands of disappearances and enforced disappearances in Mexico would put the Mexican government in a compromised position vis-à-vis international political and business partners. Secondly, disappearances are probably profitable for many state actors at every level, from governors to public prosecutors. In terms of governors, it is important to highlight that former governors of some of the states with the higher levels of violence are now indicted or wanted by national justice because of their links with organised crime. Examples of this are the former governors of Chihuahua, Coahuila, Tamaulipas and Veracruz, to name a few (Jacobo García 2017; Raphael 2017; Arreta 2016). The reports on how organised crime and local state actors worked together in Coahuila and Veracruz (previously cited) are also helpful to understand these dynamics.

As I have illustrated in this section, the categories that state actors use for naming disappearances have implications for the public policies created to deal with them. In this second period there already is a legal framework to define and punish disappearances, to which Mexico has adhered. Nonetheless, when defining disappearances and dealing with them state actors at the local and federal level have not complied with the responsibilities acquired by Mexico. The fact that the state continues to use different categories to name the disappeared has perpetrated impunity and contributed to more disappearances being carried out, as the public policies that result from the different categories do not actually tackle disappearances.

### **5.3 Dehumanising the Disappeared: The Blaming the Victim Strategy**

The way in which the disappeared have been conceptualised has been, as I have illustrated here, a constant struggle between the relatives of the disappeared and different state actors. One of the strategies that has been recurrent in this battle is blaming the victims. As with the terms used to refer to the disappeared, this strategy also has consequences that should be analysed and which have marked the work of the relatives of the disappeared and organisations working on this matter. In this section I argue that blaming the victims for their fate presents these individuals as life not deserving to be lived or mourned, thus detaching the state of its responsibility towards them (Butler 2016). This analysis will help develop the battles for memory around the disappeared examined in chapters 6 and

7; battles in which the relatives of the disappeared aim to rehumanise the disappeared, to bring them back to the public sphere, and to fill with meaning a category that is, since its inception, a rupture of meaning (Gatti 2014; Karl 2014a).

National and international human rights organisations have documented how when relatives across the country go to the authorities to report a disappearance, the responses given by public prosecutors are twofold. In the first case, they affirm that the disappeared person probably left home because they were not happy there, to be with their partner ('se fue con el novio') or to go to the United States. The agency of the disappearance is then passed on to the victim and taken away from the perpetrator. If the person left willingly, then the authorities are not to blame for the disappearance and can distance themselves from the investigation of the crime, as a crime probably was not committed (Mendoza Arrubarrena 2017; A. Pacheco 2017; A. Sánchez, n.d.). In the second set of responses, the authorities affirm the existence of the victims' links with organised crime without carrying out an investigation.<sup>81</sup> While in previous decades, the 'en algo andarían' (they must have been involved in something) or 'por algo será' (this happened for a reason) referred to the involvement of the disappeared in guerrilla movements or in some kind of anti-government activity (as was clearly stated in the 1992 CNDH report), in recent years the victims are blamed for supposedly being involved with organised crime. HRW reports that: 'according to nearly every family interviewed by Human Rights Watch, law enforcement and prosecutors' reflexive assumption in disappearance cases is that the victim was targeted for belonging to a criminal group. Authorities repeatedly embraced this theory, and indeed often voiced it to families, before undertaking a preliminary investigation into the case' (Amnesty International 2016b, 19; Human Rights Watch 2013b, 8, 40–41, 98, 174, 2011, 16, 134–35).

To this discourse, the relatives of the disappeared have responded by affirming that in a rule of law state, people who have committed a crime should be prosecuted using the appropriate legal channels. If their relatives were guilty of something, they should have been brought to justice, prosecuted and punished. An example of this response comes from Chihuahua in the late 1980s. In an article reporting on one of the activities of the Committee, the newspaper claimed to have received phone calls from the public in which they asked why these persons were disappeared or detained in the first place 'as the version saying they were terrorists and guerrillas has been circulating 'in which case the detention would be justified', the callers said. The mothers of the disappeared responded that the ideas of their children were probably unpleasant for authorities, 'but this does not give them the right to disappear them and the fact that society accepts that would create a fascist state detrimental to all' (*Diario de Chihuahua* 1988). Leticia Hidalgo (FUNDENL) told me: 'we have also said (...) if some of our children are actually guilty of something (...) they should bring them in and put them on trial' (Hidalgo Rea 2015). The discourse that state actors across the country use that blames the victim has as a consequence on the government's refusal to investigate the crimes, which leaves this task to the relatives. HRW affirms: '(the relatives) not only have to do the state's work of finding

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<sup>81</sup> See the following reports for testimonies in this regard: Open Society Justice Initiative 2016b, 102; Amnesty International 2016b, 18; Human Rights Watch 2013b, 40; Amnesty International 2013, 6.

the disappeared and those responsible for the disappearances, but they also find themselves in a position in which they have to 'prove' their loved ones' innocence' (Valdez Cárdenas 2012; Human Rights Watch 2013b, 40).

Butler's concept of precarious life is helpful to answer what it is behind the idea of someone being a criminal and then not deserving to be searched for or their case not deserving justice. According to this author, what specific lives are considered worth living and consequently worth mourning depends on a particular framework and on politically charged decisions. The precariousness of life creates populations that are already lost, 'lives that are not lives, cast as destructible or ungrievable'. These lives can be lost without grieving because they are conceived as already lost. The lives of those who 'were probably involved in something', those who are assumed to be part of organised crime are portrayed as a threat to other lives that are indeed worth living. 'In a twisted logic –Butler says-, the loss of these lives serves to protect the lives of 'the living'' (Butler 2016, 31). Felipe Calderón affirming 'they are killing each other' exemplifies a power that distinguishes an innocent 'us' and a guilty, stigmatised 'them' (Robledo Silvestre 2012, 79). A 'them' who are outside the law; the implication being that it is better that they stay that way. In a television interview in 2009, Calderón recounted an event in Reynosa, Tamaulipas, differentiating the importance of the lives of the 'criminals' and those of the police agents: 'There was a clash between federal police and the army against some criminals, and yes, people died, but we have to say that the good ones won! Because there was a strong clash and there were police officers badly wounded but none of them died. In this case it was the aggressors who died in the clash' (MilenioNoticiasTV 2009). The good ones -police and army personnel- won and are alive, and if the bad ones -the criminals- are dead, it should be only stated as their punishment for being the aggressors. The government's rhetoric illustrated by these two examples is then supported by state actors' strategies to deal with disappearances.

For Edkins, '(t)he treatment of life as bare life entails a disregard for aspects of personhood and involves protocols of communication and administration that treat people as objects'. Not searching for the disappeared; not treating mass graves, human remains, and bone fragments with diligence and respect; not carrying out proper investigations, and not punishing those responsible of the disappearances are ways in which state actors show how these lives do not deserve to be lived or to be mourned, disregarding every aspect of their personhood. Furthermore, in the Mexican context, this is not only true about the policies towards the disappeared, but also towards their relatives who have adapted their lives to search for them and are confronted with a bureaucratic apparatus that does not seem to take their pain and suffering into account. The responses to disappearances are not only not focused on finding the victims, but they also lack a focus on finding the perpetrators and providing redress to the families. As Mónaco Felipe suggests: 'Governments, public servants and political actors administer their cards with a logic that does take account of the weight of the hours, the minutes and the seconds for those who wait for a disappeared. One year means 8,760 hours without spending the day together, without watching them waking up, without eating together, without hearing their voices' (Mónaco Felipe 2015, 217).

The stigmatisation of the victims also contributes to the normalisation of violence. Instead of a human rights crisis in which the state is implicated, disappearances are presented as private and isolated problems (Morbiato 2017). In this regard, Schedler argues that at the individual level people have also normalised violence, adopted the 'narco-language' referred to in previous chapters, and made 'violence a delimited, understandable and expectable phenomenon'. 'The wide category of 'narcos' and the extensive use of the correspondent prefix (...) serve the same purpose: they create a symbolic distance between our civilised world and a world inhabited by barbarism where violence is normal' (Schedler 2015, 15, 16). Schedler explains how thinking about the members of organised crime as a homogenous group allows society to think they deserve the worse. The author claims: 'criminals are the representatives of evil. It is the bad people who give us the tranquillity of being good. (...) Even if they live geographically around us, they do not share the symbolic community of us'. He cites Steven Pinker who suggests that human sympathy depends on how the victims are defined; in the case of the war in Mexico, there is much data on the victims, but not many stories behind that data (Schedler 2015, 142). As I argue in chapter 3, how the victims are portrayed impacts on society's low will to remember.

In this chapter I have shown how the relatives of the disappeared of the two periods have consistently named the disappeared in ways that emphasise the government's responsibilities in these crimes whilst with a variety of state responses, different governments have used categories that detach them from those responsibilities. In these battles over the meanings of the disappearances what is at stake is the quality of the governments and of the victims. Besides this, I have presented the different governments' tendency to blame the victims, by which they construct an idea of what Butler has called 'ungrievable lives' which leads to a normalisation of violence and to the social acceptance of the disappeared (Butler 2012, 2016).

Against this, the work of the relatives is crucial. In chapters 6 and 7 I analyse the strategies that relatives of the disappeared, acting as 'memory entrepreneurs' (Jelin) or 'activists of meaning' (Gatti) create in terms of fighting against silence and for their relatives to be recognised as 'living lives' and thus worthy of being searched for, remembered, and mourned. According to Gatti, resistance involves recovering meaning, remaking and reconstructing identities from their remains (Jelin 2003b; Gatti 2014). By talking about them as disappeared, by bringing them to the streets and to the public sphere in different ways, the relatives assert the aliveness of the disappeared, rehumanising them (Karl 2014a).

## CHAPTER 6 THE BATTLES OF MEMORY AROUND THE DISAPPEARED IN MEXICO: DATES AND MEMORIALS

The memory of the disappeared is still a contested arena in Mexico. In this chapter, I advance the argument that there have been battles for memory around the disappeared for more than four decades, even though these have only occasionally been at the centre of the public debate. I examine those battles by looking at two dates and five memorials, and analyse the actors and the different contexts in which they have occurred. Following Nora, I think of these dates and memorials as memory realms, which are not only physical places, but also people or dates that aid memory to be present. These realms of memory exist because society has forgotten to remember, 'because there are no longer real environments of memory' (Nora 1989, 7). For Nora there are two types of memory realms, the dominant and the dominated. The former are cold and imposed from above, whilst the latter are a refuge where the heart of memory is still beating (Nora 2008, 38). In this chapter I analyse cases of both kinds of memory realms and their implication for the broader battles for memory (Jelin 2003b).

The memory of violence and particularly the memory of the disappeared has not received as much attention in Mexico as in other countries of the region (Argentina is an important example, but battles for memory have also been studied in other countries like Peru, Chile, Brazil, Guatemala, El Salvador to name a few).<sup>82</sup> Nonetheless, as I have analysed in previous chapters and will show here, relatives and other victims have consistently fought to debate these issues publically in Mexico too. The mere fact that disappearances of the late 1960s onwards are still discussed today, even if they are not the main debate, is a reflection of the relatives' and survivors' fight. Allier and Crenzel put this as follows:

The words and actions of the relatives of the disappeared, of the victims of torture, of political prisoners, of exiles, of survivors of clandestine jails and of mass killings of indigenous communities have been essential for reconstructing the materiality of the abuses, denouncing the perpetrators and restoring dignity and humanity to the victims of violence in Latin America (Allier Montaño and Crenzel 2015, 11).

When analysing the battles of memory, thinking about the actors involved in them and their agency is fundamental, as it is these actors who bestow particular meanings on dates and memorials converting them into memory realms. In the following analysis I identify the memory entrepreneurs 'who link in their actions the past (to render homage to the victims) and the future (to transmit messages to the 'new generations')'. These actors have an interpretation of the past which relates to who they are and to the version of the event they want to install in the public space (Jelin and Langland 2002, 4; Jelin

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<sup>82</sup> See examples in chapter 1.

2007, 2003a). As Achugar states, it is important to analyse the political agenda of these actors (Achugar 2002, 211). In the following examples I analyse the differences in the impacts and the discourses advanced with the memorials depending on whether they are built by the relatives of the disappeared or by state actors. In Mexico, unlike Brazil, Chile or Argentina, many of the memory realms, including dates or memorials, have not been created or approved by the state (Jelin and Langland 2002).

In the following pages I examine dates and memorials in which the meanings of the disappearances are disputed in the public space, discussing how many times these are spaces that become places of memory with meaning after the actions of memory entrepreneurs, like the Square of the Disappeared in Nuevo León and the House of Indomitable Memory in Mexico City. I also argue that not every memorial serves as a memory site, as in the case of the memorial installed at the CDHDF. For these to be memory realms, the intentions behind them and the will to remember are crucial (Nora 1989). I show how these memory realms are meaningful for different communities and the reach they have.

In other countries of Latin America memorials have been erected in sites directly related with state violence. There is then a struggle over the meanings of those sites against those who want to erase the past from them. In many cases those debates have been public and involved many different actors. Examples of this are the statue of Salvador Allende in Santiago (Chile), the Nunca Mais memorial in Recife (Brazil), and the Memory Park in Buenos Aires, Argentina (Hite 2002; Brito 2002; Tappatá de Valdez 2002). The Mexican case is different. Except for the case of the memorial in Allende, Coahuila, the other memory realms presented in this thesis have not been built in places that have a direct relationship with the disappeared. Even whilst there are cases in which memorials to the disappeared have been built in places with a special significance it has not produced a public debate, which also reflects the different level of attention that disappearances and other human rights violations generate in Mexico compared to other countries in the region. In many cases, the battles for memory around the disappeared of the second period are in their early stages, whilst the events are still unfolding as disappearances keep on taking place in the country.

What is at stake in these battles for memory is the national narrative created by different governments, which have insisted throughout the decades in portraying a Mexican state that is respectful of human rights. Using particular dates and different memory realms, relatives of the disappeared question that narrative. Likewise, state actors use some of those dates, like the 30<sup>th</sup> of August, and some memory sites such as the Memorial in Allende to advance their own discourse. Besides questioning the state, these memory realms also dispute the idea of who the victims are. As such, battles for memory are also battles over what the past and the future will be (Olick and Robbins 1998). According to Robledo, 'memory is a political asset in which the legitimacy of the government, of the victims and the nation's project itself are in dispute' (Robledo Silvestre 2015b, 77). In this regard, memory realms can be understood as the materialisation of these disputes, as they are part of how the past is administered in the present with a focus on the future (Achugar 2002; Lessa 2013).

## 6.1 Dates and the Memorialisation of the Disappeared in Mexico

The 2<sup>nd</sup> of October and the 10<sup>th</sup> of June are the two most important dates that have been memorialised regarding state violence in Mexico. As has been pointed out in chapter 3, both dates mark events in which students were attacked and where many of them, along with people demonstrating with them, were killed. There are annual commemorations of the massacres in Mexico City, where students and social organisations march to remember what happened and to ask for justice for these crimes. In terms of scholarly production around memory and state violence, the events of 1968 in Mexico appear to hold a privileged place.<sup>83</sup>

The landscape is different regarding dates to mark and remember the disappeared. As I describe below, the dates used for that purpose are not dates that mark moments of state violence, but dates of struggle and dates that represent and resignify the absence of the disappeared. As Jelin affirms, there are certain dates when the past is made present in public rituals in which new meanings are given and memories of the past are built and re-built (Jelin 2002, 2). As with other memory sites, the dates on a calendar have a different impact on various different levels. There are dates that are only meaningful at the local or regional level while others can have a national, regional or even international significance (Jelin 2002).

The scale of the commemoration in Mexico is different to other commemorations in Latin America (e.g. the 24<sup>th</sup> of March in Argentina or the 11<sup>th</sup> of September in Chile), as in Mexico it is mainly relatives of the disappeared and human rights organisations who attend them, not a large sector of society as it is elsewhere. The lack of a broad social will to remember to which I have referred before has an impact on the scope of these commemorations. With the exception of the 26 of September when broader sectors of society commemorate the disappearance of 43 Ayotzinapa students, these dates memorialising the disappeared in Mexico are not included in official calendars, but rather appear in parallel calendars important to the relatives of the disappeared.<sup>84</sup> Although there is not usually a confrontation at the public level over the meaning of these dates, I argue that there still is a battle for memory around them and that the commemorations carried out by relatives of the disappeared and human rights organisations as memory entrepreneurs serve as counter discourses to the discourse on disappearances promoted by state actors.

### 6.1.1 Mother's Day

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<sup>83</sup> The student movement and the Tlatelolco Massacre are analysed in Chapter 2. The scholarship around the memorialisation of this massacre is dealt with in the Introduction.

<sup>84</sup> The battles over meanings around the 26 September are analysed in Chapter 7.



The 10<sup>th</sup> of May, when Mother's Day is celebrated in Mexico, has been resignified by relatives of the disappeared of both periods as a date to remember the disappeared, to discuss their stories in public, and to challenge the official discourses around them. During my interviews, the majority of the relatives of both periods expressed the importance of this date for remembering their disappeared. This day was established by the government through an alliance between the Minister of Education, José Vasconcelos, and the head of *Excelsior* newspaper, in 1922. From 1922 until 1971, *Excelsior* organised public events in Mexico City to commemorate this day. The same newspaper created the Monument to the Mother, which was inaugurated in 1949 by then President Miguel Alemán (1946-1952) (La redacción 2010a; Redacción 2017b). Mother's Day is a highly celebrated day in Mexico. Besides some public events or school festivals, Mexican families get together to spend time with each other and render homage to the mothers. Even before the actions organised by relatives of the disappeared, this date had been used to bring up issues regarding women. In 1971, the Mexican Women's Union (Unión de Mujeres Mexicanas), a feminist group, protested at the Monument to the Mother 'against the myth of mother' (Lamas 2012; D. Ramos 2011; Mayer n.d.). A similar protest was held in May 1974. While these protests tried to problematise the role of maternity and how it is seen in Mexican society, protests led by mothers of disappeared persons embrace the traditional idea of motherhood. During the protests held by Eureka and by mothers of the disappeared from 2012 onwards, what is denounced is not the conservativeness of the role of motherhood or its implications in terms of women's rights, but the impossibility of carrying out this role and of celebrating this day as these are mothers whose children have been disappeared.

During the first period, Eureka organised different actions to mark this day. From communiqués and letters in newspapers to protests in meaningful places like the Military Camp No.1 and Los Pinos presidential residence in 1988 (Maza 1988), to a symbolic crucifixion in the Zócalo. Mother's Day, along with other dates such as Children's Day, Christmas Day, and the International Day of Human Rights are marked with actions by this group with two intentions: first, to create a greater involvement by broader society, and second, to denounce the state's responsibility for these crimes. While the disappeared were not present in the government's public discourse, which presented a democratic country that welcomed people persecuted elsewhere, the actions of the mothers of the disappeared were counter discourses which brought the disappeared to the streets in different ways. As Jelin argues, the battles for memory begin when the events take place (Jelin 2003b). The reports of PGR (1979) and CNDH (1992) spoke of people who were not disappeared, but had been killed in different ways or were just absent. As a counter discourse to that, Eureka used this date to mark the absence of the disappeared in the public arena, to expose the government's responsibility in the issue, and to demand the government to set them free, always speaking about the disappeared in the present tense, denying the government's version of their death.

Another date that Eureka observed for decades is the 28<sup>th</sup> of August. This date, which marked the anniversary of their first hunger strike in 1978, was for them a symbol of the struggle for the disappeared. As President López Portillo created the Amnesty Law in part as the result of the

pressure of Eureka's hunger strike, this has been commemorated by them as a reminder of the importance of their own struggle. Marking this date aimed at bringing the disappeared to the streets, but also at constantly reminding the public and the government about the Committee's struggle and force. As Nora explains, memory sites need to be created, as memory would not exist spontaneously (Nora in Ricœur 2004). It was the members of Eureka, accompanied by other organisations, which had to bring their own story to the public space and to make of this date a memory site that preserved this memory because it is not part of the broader social memory. As I explain below, perpetuating the memory of Eureka's struggle is also one of the purposes of the House of the Indomitable Memory. The commemoration of the 28<sup>th</sup> of August is held regularly at this place, but it has not been adopted as a date to be observed by the wider movement of relatives of the disappeared. As I have analysed above this might be the result of the disconnection between the relatives of the two periods and of a lack of impact of the memorialisation of this date.

Mother's Day has also served as a memory realm where discourses around the disappeared are disputed in the second period of disappearances. In 2012 FUUNDEC organised the first national Mother's Day march in this second period calling it 'March of National Dignity; Mothers Searching for their Sons and Daughters and Looking for Justice'. Relatives from different states joined the demonstration and activities in other countries (El Salvador, Honduras, the United States, and Canada) took place. While Eureka organised different activities every year to mark this date, the commemoration since 2012 has adopted a fixed format: a march followed by a rally in the steps of the Ángel de la Independencia followed by a shared lunch. As in the case of the different marches in Neuquén, Argentina, analysed by Mombello, the whole ritual established by this commemoration itself builds meanings. As with those marches, this march has two meanings; on the one hand, the places it touches (the Monument to the Mother and the Ángel de la Independencia), and on the other hand, the collective and communitarian aspect of the march (Mombello 2002). The Monument to the Mother represents the motherhood that cannot be exercised completely as the children are disappeared. The Ángel is one of the most visible sights of the capital of the city. As with the actions organised by Eureka, the Mother's Day march serves as a space to dispute the official discourse around disappearances, while making disappearances visible and inviting society to make them their own.

During the march, collectives from across the country march with their banners and pictures of the disappeared, sometimes wearing a particular colour or similar t-shirts. During the march, as in the majority of public actions in which relatives of the disappeared participate, the bodies of the relatives also become memory carriers. The Eureka Committee members always wore black as a sign of grief, but not grief for a dead relative but -in Sara Hernández's words- because their soul was sad (Hernández de Ramírez Duarte 2015a). Using a green t-shirt to symbolise hope, or facemasks with a particular slogan, or carrying the pictures of their disappeared loved ones are also ways to use the body to transmit memory. Sturken speaks of 'technologies of memory' that 'embody and generate memory and are thus implicated in the power dynamics of memory's production' (Sturken 1997, 10).

In these marches, as in almost every public activity, relatives use their bodies as technologies of memory which put into question a dominant discourse around the so-called 'War on Drugs'. At the same time, they make visible the present absence of the disappeared. The absent disappeared are technologies of memory on their own made visible by their relatives.

During the march and the rally, banners and pictures of the disappeared are displayed. The relatives carry pictures of different sizes, black and white or in colour, banners with pictures, with slogans, with the names of the organisations. Pictures and banners do not seem big enough to show the pain of those carrying them. When the different blocks arrive at the Ángel, the pictures appear to be disputing the space; those carrying them try to get a spot from where the pictures will be visible.<sup>85</sup> As Strejilevich explains:

(W)hat is most striking is the connection established between the missing and those who 'hold' them. While the disappeared is the main character wandering around the neighbourhood, the citizen becomes the support without which the shadow would not be able to walk. A connection is thus established between the disappeared biography and that of the living, whose existence is now marked by the absent one (Strejilevich 2010, 237).

The way in which the lives of the relatives are affected after the disappearances of their loved ones - analysed in depth in chapter 2- is performed in this march. Instead of celebrating this date with their families, mothers of the disappeared leave their homes to get together with others in the same position, literally carrying their sons and daughters across the city in search for answers and for solidarity.

This event offers a space for what Robledo defines as the construction of *communitas*, 'which provides a specific framework for integrating ambiguity into the world of the living and providing a kind of social 'treatment' for absences' (Robledo Silvestre 2014, 8). Throughout the rally, mothers from different groups share their stories and messages from their collectives. The rally also provides an open microphone for persons with disappeared loved ones who are not organised in a group or collective, many of whom share their stories for the first time at the rally. These testimonies are not only cathartic, but can also be read as counterdiscourses that empower the speakers, 'making them active players in the politics of Memory' (Robben 2005b, 133).

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<sup>85</sup> For an analysis on the meaning and significance of the pictures of the disappeared, see: Longoni and García 2013.



Figure 15 Mother's Day march in Mexico City (2014) (Courtesy Bruno De Vecchi)

The participants are mainly relatives of the disappeared, organisations from Mexico City and other places of the country and international organisations. That the participants in the march are mainly relatives (what they often refer to as 'sisters and brothers of the same pain'), helps to create a feeling of a safe space where the ambiguity and uncertainty of disappearances are understood. Besides being a space to contest memories and to raise awareness about the disappeared, this march also serves as a place of public and social mourning. Instead of the private process of grief, this date transformed into a memory realm provides a space for the occurrence of a social process of mourning (Robledo Silvestre 2014, 9).



*Figure 16 Relatives of the disappeared stand in the staircase of the Ángel de la Independencia during Mother's Day March (2014) (Courtesy Bruno De Vecchi)*

The rationale behind this march is that there is nothing to celebrate as these mothers' children are disappeared. As in many of the actions around disappearances, the tension between private and public is present. As stated by Lebon and Maier the mothers of the disappeared, while embracing the traditional role of motherhood and in many cases of how women are expected to act within their societies and communities, have also been transgressive of that role when passing from a private role of individual mothers to a public role of collective mothers in the public space (Lebon and Maier 2006, 37). The 10<sup>th</sup> of May demonstration is a good example of this. Instead of being in the private space of their houses with their families, these mothers change the meaning of the date by getting together with other mothers from across the country to demand the return of the disappeared, justice, and an



end to disappearances.<sup>86</sup> Even before these marches, other events on Mother's Day regarding disappearances had taken place (La redacción 2010b; *Proceso* 2011).

The demonstration on the 10<sup>th</sup> of May is also a demonstration of strength and organisation, when hundreds of relatives of the disappeared and members of human rights organisations travel to Mexico City not only to symbolically ask for their disappeared and to make them visible in the public space, but also to directly dialogue with government officials. In 2015, when the fieldwork for this thesis was carried out, the relatives of the disappeared who travelled to Mexico City held meetings with representatives of PGR, CNDH, and SEGOB. As seen in previous chapters, the discourse of state actors around the disappeared of the second period presents a reality of vague figures of people 'not found' or 'lost', and the government does not deal with disappearances as such. The role of the relatives as memory entrepreneurs and as carriers of counter memories, has been to speak of disappeared persons, to create registers, and to bring those disappeared to the public space. The government's vague and changing figures are confronted with names, faces, and stories of people who have been disappeared. In 2015, the UNCED concluded that disappearances in Mexico are widespread, which was quickly denied by the Mexican government (Committee on Enforced Disappearances 2015). Having this demonstration in the centre of the city with organisations and relatives from across the country serves as a visual reminder of the scale and ubiquity of the problem and the similarities of the stories in different places.

In terms of the connection of both periods of disappearances, the organisations of relatives of the first period have been responsible for bringing those stories to this space. Rosario Ibarra spoke at the first march (Turati 2012a). In later years, other members of Eureka have joined the protest and shared their stories. Members of AFADEM and of H.I.J.O.S. have also participated at these events bringing to the space the demand for the return alive of the disappeared of past decades as well as the demand for justice. As a pivotal organisation between the two periods, H.I.J.O.S. has also emphasised in their interventions the struggle of the *Doñas* and the ways in which they used to mark this day. With their presence, these collectives resignify in the present the memories of past decades.

The majority of the interviewees related to the second period of disappearances did not know that Eureka had also organised actions around this date before them. Eureka's tradition of marking the day and making a public statement on the streets or in the media does not seem to have permeated the discourse of these new organisations. Nonetheless, slogans and images, such as 'hijo escucha, tu madre está en la lucha' (listen, son, your mother is in the struggle); vivos se los llevaron, vivos los queremos; las madres unidas jamás serán vencidas (the mothers united will never be defeated); ¿dónde están? ¿dónde están? ¿nuestros hijos dónde están? (Where are they? where are they? where are our children?), all of which express the relationship between mothers and disappeared children and which were used by Eureka decades ago, are still now used by these mothers. Images

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<sup>86</sup> For examples of actions across the country, see: *Proceso* 2013; Flores Contreras 2013; Mayorga 2014; Zavaleta 2016; Campos Garza 2013.

of mothers with the slogan ‘The mothers do not cry anymore, now they fight’ (las madres ya no lloran, ahora luchan) seen in Eureka’s rallies since the 1980s are now seen in these events as well. Although not always knowingly, the new generations and new groups of relatives of the disappeared use the discourses that Eureka and other organisations made public in past decades. The memories of the disappeared, which have not had a prominence in the public space have nonetheless travelled in time and impacted the new generations. It is likely that the human rights organisations that accompany the groups of relatives of the disappeared and that have a history being part of social struggles have played a role, even if unintentionally, in this transmission of memory. An example of this is how the poster and communiqué for the 2016 edition of the march adapt Eureka’s slogan ‘las madres ya no lloran, ahora luchan’ to ‘las madres ya no lloramos, ahora luchamos’, using we instead of them. The poster includes disappeared persons from the 1970s and 1980s.



Figure 17 Poster for the Fifth March of National Dignity (2016) (CEDEHM 2016).

The 10<sup>th</sup> of May is then a date when the absence of the disappeared is brought to the public space and embodied in their relatives. The date has been resignified by relatives of the disappeared for decades, but has not become a date that the general population would associate with the crisis of disappearances in Mexico. There is not an open contestation of this date as there could be with others in other countries of the region, but there is a battle for memory in which the coordinated and organised relatives contest the dominant discourse on disappearances. With the march and the rally new meanings are constructed around the disappeared, and the march connects the present with an active future (Mombello 2002). Creating a healing space for relatives of the disappeared, this march also shows the coordination and similarities among different organisations across the country, while serving as a memory realm to preserve memories that are not yet installed in the wider social body.

### **6.1.2 30<sup>th</sup> of August: The International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances**

The 30<sup>th</sup> of August, the International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances, is another date when the memories of the disappeared are debated in public in Mexico. The analysis of how the commemorations on this day have changed helps to understand the battles for memory, and how the demands around the disappeared and the organisation for them have evolved (Jelin 2002). While the 10<sup>th</sup> of May is a national festivity that is resignified in the light of disappearances, the 30<sup>th</sup> of August is an international day of remembrance that became institutionalised through collective struggles. This date was officially adopted by the UN in 2010, when the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance was adopted (*Resolution Adopted by the General Assembly on 21 December 2010 [on the Report of the Third Committee (A/65/456/Add.2 (Part II))] 65/209. International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance 2011; 'International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances, 30 August' n.d.*). FEDEFAM, of which Mexican organisations are members, was in charge of lobbying for the inclusion of this day by the UN (Ayala 2011).

While in Chile, Paraguay, Argentina, and Brazil there are specific dates that serve as realms of memory, in Mexico, by contrast, there are no specific dates associated to disappearances. In those countries, particular dates that represent an era of state violence are memorialised and contested: the installation of military regimes in Brazil, Chile and Argentina on the 31 March (1964), 11 September (1973) and 24 March (1976), respectively; the birthday of Paraguay's dictator Stroessner on the 3 November; as well as dates in which members of the armed forces and of the opposition were killed in Uruguay on the 14 April and 20 May respectively (Jelin 2002; Candina Polomer 2002; Lorenz 2002; Marchesi 2002; González Vera 2002; da Silva Catela and Alessandra 2002). In Mexico, meanwhile, the characteristics of the state violence of the first period of political violence and of the human rights violations of the second period make it difficult for memories to be discussed in or attached to one particular date.



Moreover, as mentioned before, the memory of political violence in other Latin American countries has had a more central role than in Mexico. Whilst the majority of the population in the previously mentioned countries suffered an alteration to their daily lives as the result of the military regimes or civil or internal wars, in Mexico there was a continuation of the same political regime, and a selective use of state violence. As a result of this, only a small proportion of the population saw their lives directly affected by repression, which was also less overt than in other countries. Even whilst many organisations speak of the declaration of the so-called 'War on Drugs' as the beginning of the second period of disappearances and as the background for a human rights crisis, there is not one singular date associated to this in terms of memorialisation, although the 8<sup>th</sup> of December when Calderón publicly declared the war could be used as such. It could be argued that the daily lives of many across the country have been affected by the militarisation of the country, but this has been a gradual process and again, one that occurred under a civilian government.

In this context, organisations of relatives of the disappeared in their role as memory entrepreneurs have used Mother's Day as well as internationally observed dates on disappearances, such as the 30<sup>th</sup> of August, to voice their counter memories. The 30<sup>th</sup> of August has been adopted recently in comparison to dates observed in other countries, but its adoption illustrates how the battles of memory around the disappeared have evolved in Mexico. Collectives of relatives of the disappeared have organised events on this date to raise awareness of the disappearances in the country, including photographic campaigns and local demonstrations and marches in different cities and towns. In this way, this date has served to keep the memory of the disappeared alive (H.I.J.O.S. México n.d.; '30 de Agosto, Día Del Desaparecido' 2014; La redacción n.d.).

In the first years, the organisations of each period would organise separate events, but as the movement has progressed into a more coherent form, this date has also provided a platform for the two periods of disappearances and for different organisations in the country to coincide and interact. In recent years, organisations from across the country have come together and organised parallel demonstrations in different cities, including a national march in Mexico City in 2013. As with the use of specialised human rights language, observing this date, which is commemorated by organisations and relatives across the world, also inserts the relatives of both periods into a global human rights arena.

The way in which the date has been marked has also changed over time. In 2017, for example, while some organisations held events similar to other years to remember the disappeared and to push for government's action in this regard, the Movimiento por Nuestros Desaparecidos en México organised events across the country to put pressure on the Senate for the approval of the General Law on Disappearances (Redacción 2017a). Since 2015, the General Law on Disappearance has gained increasing importance, and in 2017 the demand by many groups of relatives was organised around it. As mentioned before, the Law has been the subject of many disputes, and the families have insisted that their views be included. The way in which this day is commemorated shows the changes in the

actions of the relatives of the disappeared and particularly the impact of the professionalisation of the organisations and the accompaniment of human rights organisations analysed in previous chapters.

As the memories of the disappeared have gained more prominence, state actors have also used this date to portray their own version of the issue and to dispute the meanings put in place by the organisations of relatives. Important examples of this are events organised by the PGR in 2015 and 2016. Since the disappearance of the 43 students in Iguala in September 2014, and the examination of Mexico by the UN Committee on Enforced Disappearances, the Mexican government increasingly has been subject to international pressure to deal with this issue. As I analyse in chapter 7, the Ayotzinapa case has fuelled changes in how the government deals with these crimes discursively. Organisations of relatives of the disappeared and human rights organisations have used this day to insist on the responsibility of the government in these crimes and to show the inefficacy of the state's strategy against disappearances. In contrast, PGR, the federal office in charge of dealing with disappearances, has organised events to mark this day by perpetuating a discourse of human rights that, as I have argued, has not been accompanied by effective actions.

The events organised by the state to mark the International Day for the Victims of Enforced Disappearance (a series of talks and a conference) have served mainly as events organised for governmental personnel in which speakers have reiterated the Mexican government's progress in dealing with the issue. For example, the Under Secretary Specialised in the Investigation of Federal Crimes affirmed that 'Mexico has assumed with responsibility the challenges that derive from the crime of enforced disappearance of persons, and effective legal, judicial and administrative measures have been taken to eradicate that scourge to society'. The fact that Isabel Miranda de Wallace from the organisation Stop Kidnappings (*Alto al Secuestro*) was the only person from civil society present as a speaker at one of the events speaks of the government's unwillingness to be criticised. While privileging some voices over others, state actors also privilege certain narratives, which in this case are more similar to its own version of the events (Jelin 2003b; Robben 2005b). Miranda de Wallace's position towards the government has been highly questioned by the human rights community, as it has always been compliant rather than critical. She was the PAN's candidate at the local elections in the Federal District in 2012, and has been an ally of the government in different opportunities when discussing violence and human rights. *Alto al Secuestro* works on kidnappings rather than disappearances, which serves the government's strategy of conflating different crimes as if they were the same, as explained in chapter 5 (*Procuraduría General de la República n.d., n.d.*).

Thus, while civil society denounced the government's implication in and lack of response towards disappearances, the federal government organised events with the same narrative of progress in tackling the problem to convince international bodies such as the IACHR and the UNCED. As with Mother's Day, the general Mexican population has not been much involved in the International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearance. The lack of a broad social will to remember fuels the necessity of the relatives of organising these events (Nora 1989). Nevertheless, the 30<sup>th</sup> of August

has served, like the majority of the actions undertaken by the relatives of the disappeared, to rehumanise the disappeared and to break with their invisibility while bringing them to the public space (Karl 2014a). This is not a date in which a particular event is in dispute, as would be the case in other countries, but what is disputed is the whole narrative about disappearances and more generally about the state's implication in human rights violations.

### **6.1.3 When the Private becomes Public: Commemoration on Personal Dates**

Private dates can also be a moment when the counter memories embodied by the relatives of the disappeared become public, making the absence of the disappeared visible. As explained in chapter 4, dates such as birthdays, anniversaries of the disappearance, Christmas Day, and New Year's Eve can be challenging moments for the relatives of the disappeared. Nonetheless, many of them have converted these difficult private dates into dates of struggle in which memories of the disappearances are made visible. These acts serve as a collective mourning space as described by Robledo by providing an opportunity to deal with the absence, but they also function as exemplary memories and as acts that rehumanise the disappeared while countering the dominant discourses (Robledo Silvestre 2014; Karl 2014a; Todorov 2000).

According to Barahona de Brito, González Enríquez and Aguilar, commemorations are a way to resist the 'logic of forgetting' by exercising remembrance (Barahona de Brito, González Enríquez, and Aguilar Fernández 2001). The dates analysed below become memory realms as they serve to create a memory that would not exist otherwise (Nora 1989, 12). These dates are not incorporated into national or official calendars or discourses, but irrupt as stubborn memories resisting an official discourse that denies the humanity and many times the existence of the disappeared.

The week of action on the thirtieth anniversary of the disappearance of Rafael Ramírez Duarte in 2007 exemplifies how these dates that could be used for private grieving can take a public turn and become exemplary memories (H.I.J.O.S. México 2007; Olivares Alonso 2017). In June 11 1977, Rafael Ramírez Duarte, member of the LC23S, was disappeared by the political police in Mexico City. He was seen alive later that year in the clandestine prison at the Military Camp No.1. The Mexican government has systematically denied its implication in Rafael's disappearance, even though intelligence documents show that the political police held him illegally. Rafael's mother was one of the core members of Eureka, along with Rafael's wife, Sara, interviewed for this work. On the thirtieth anniversary of his disappearance, H.I.J.O.S. organised a series of actions to remember Rafael at the university where he was studying, in the factory where he was working when he was disappeared, in the family house where he grew up, in the high school where he studied, and outside the Military Camp where he was last seen.

The actions organised by H.I.J.O.S. challenge the silence that followed a failed transitional justice process in which disappearances of the 1960s onwards were dealt with superficially, without clarifying the whereabouts of the disappeared. The repression carried out by the government is not taught in schools and is not recognised in other ways, and perpetrators of disappearances still enjoy impunity (Karl 2014a). With these public commemorations, the relatives of Rafael Ramírez Duarte make visible that these cases are still open and that the families are still asking for the disappeared. Moreover, H.I.J.O.S. shows that it is not only the family who misses Rafael, but the entire society, the people at the factory, at his university, who should be asking for him and for the disappeared in general. These actions that rehumanise the disappeared aim at creating a social memory of the disappearances (Karl 2014a, 2014b). This action means that Rafael ceases to be a disappeared person and becomes again a student, a worker, and a father. His absence ceases to be a private absence concerning his family and becomes a social absence.

With these actions, a particular case of disappearance serves as an exemplary memory (Todorov 2000). Instead of just describing the particular case and the individual implications it has had, Rafael's story is used as an example of something more general, of enforced disappearances for political reasons, using it to exemplify a broader context. The literal memory is an end in itself, while exemplary memory looks for action and aims at building justice (Todorov 2000). As H.I.J.O.S. claim, in the absence of legal justice, social justice must be created by society. In their role as a pivotal organisation, H.I.J.O.S. have also used the disappearances of the late 1960s onwards as exemplary memories for the new disappearances in different contexts that I have analysed in chapter 4. As Todorov explains, while acknowledging the particularities of the events, they are made available to understand new situations with new agents. 'The past then becomes a principle of action' (Todorov 2000, 31).

The rehumanisation of the disappeared analysed by Karl also occurs when birthdays and festivities like Christmas and New Year's Eve become public dates of struggle (Karl 2014a, 2014b). Families who cannot celebrate because one of their members is disappeared, take this lack of celebration to the streets to make it visible. They gather outside public buildings, bringing cake to the disappeared, or taking along presents for Christmas, displaying pictures and sharing their stories. Many times, relatives or human rights organisations participate in such events (Camacho Servín and Ocampo Arista 2015; 'Padres de Ayotzinapa Marchan a Los Pinos "Contra El Olvido"' 2014; Policiaca 2015; Ocampo Arista 2016b; Ochoa 2013). As previously mentioned, maternity and also family ties more broadly become matters for collective concern, and the relatives of one person become the relatives of many. In this sense, celebrating one's anniversary or birthday symbolises also the celebration of many. Moreover, these acts serve as a counter discourse to the official discourse that blames the victims, and that presents them as numbers within confusing categories and, as I argued before, as ungrivable lives.

## 6.2 How to Represent Absence: Memorials for the Disappeared

Like the analysis of commemorations, the study of memorials can shed light on the battles for memory around the disappeared. As Jelin and Langland point out, the understanding of the political and social processes by which a concrete space acquires a particular meaning, so that it goes from being just a space to become a space with specific meanings of memorialisation, is fundamental for this analysis (Jelin and Langland 2002, 3). The failed transitional justice measures of the early 2000s will serve as the background for the memorials that exemplify the battles for memory of the disappearances of the late 1960s onwards. In the case of the second period, the discourse on the 'War on Drugs' will frame the state and civil society's spaces of memory. While in countries like Argentina and Chile there is already a public discourse on the dictatorship and human rights, which is used and resignified in places of memory, in Mexico many times places of memory serve to make the counter discourses on the disappeared public (Schindel 2014).

Mexico is different to other cases studied in terms of battles for memory. A main difference between many of the studies of memorialisation of violent pasts in other countries of Latin America and Mexico is the lack of what Jelin and Langland call the 'approving sanction of the state'. For the authors, this is what makes a memorial legitimate. Nonetheless, as I argue, even though it is not acknowledged or approved by the state, a memory site can still be a vehicle of memory (Jelin and Langland 2002, 3), linking subjectivities to the past and present, and materialising a particular version of the past (Jelin 2003b). Similarly, memorials that are approved by the state might be used to close down processes of remembering instead of creating a living memory. As explained before, the failed transitional justice process in Mexico and the ongoing disappearances crisis make the relationship with the state over the memories of the disappeared different to other countries (i.e. Chile, Argentina, Brazil), where a clearer transition has taken place. In Mexico, the memories presented by the relatives have generally not been supported by state actors (or by the mainstream media), which has impacted on the scope of those memories (Lessa 2013; Drinot 2009a).

### 6.2.1 Memorial of the Disappeared: Federal District's Human Rights Commission

The failed transitional justice measures, analysed in chapter 3, produced a public discussion of disappearances of the late 1960s onwards. As I have mentioned above, Eureka was an outspoken critic of the whole process since the beginning and refused to collaborate. It is in the context of this process that two memorials were created as a counter discourse to the official narrative of dealing with the past: the memorial at the Federal District's Human Rights Commission (CDHDF) and the project of the House of Indomitable Memory. Both of them responded to a local logic of remembrance

and acknowledgement in contrast to the federal memory policies of the time. Nonetheless, the differences in their creation have also meant a difference in their impact and afterlife. As I argue, while the Indomitable Memory House is a memory realm that helps to actively discuss and resignify the past, the memorial at the CDHDF has not served to advance the discussion on disappearances in the country.

The memorial to the disappeared at the CDHDF was set up in 2004, following a proposal of local ombudsman Emilio Álvarez Icaza. This memorial was meant to be a symbol that would serve at the same time to remember the disappeared since the late 1960s and the struggle of Eureka. Since its inception, the Committee had a close relationship with human rights organisations. In the times of the National Front against Repression (FNCR), meetings were held at CENCOS, whose director was José Álvarez Icaza (Emilio Álvarez Icaza's father). According to Sara Hernández de Ramírez Duarte, this connection was an incentive for the memorial to be created (Hernández de Ramírez Duarte 2015b). Edith López Ovalle (H.I.J.O.S.) suggests that with the memorial the CDHDF affirmed: 'if the Mexican state does not recognise the disappeared, we, from this autonomous human rights commission, do recognise them' (López Ovalle 2015). Members of Eureka and H.I.J.O.S. spoke at the memorial's inauguration ceremony. In 2011, the memorial made of 557 plastic plaques containing the names and date of disappearance of those people in Eureka's list of disappeared persons, was reinstalled in the hallway to the Digna Ochoa auditorium in the new Commission's building.<sup>87</sup> It is important to note that by including this list, the CDHDF left aside other accounts, for example that of AFADEM, which has over 1,300 cases of disappeared persons registered, a consequence perhaps of Álvarez Icaza's close relationship to Eureka. The names are accompanied by a plaque that reads 'Memorial of the Disappeared. August 2004'. There is no explanation of the memorial and no more information is offered to visitors. The aesthetic decisions for this memorial are not recorded and I was not able to interview those involved in its creation so it is hard to know why this was the case.

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<sup>87</sup> Human rights defender Digna Ochoa was found dead by gunshot in her house in 2001. Ignoring evidence that implied otherwise, the Federal District prosecutor (PGJDF) concluded that she had committed suicide. Human rights defenders across the country disputed this ruling. The decision to name the auditorium after her shows the critical stance of the CDHDF at the time ('Report on the Digna Ochoa Murder Investigation' 2002; 'The Assassination of Digna Ochoa: A Look at the Life and Death of the Renowned Mexican Human Rights Lawyer' 2006).



Figure 18 Entrance to the CDHDF with the Memorial of the Disappeared (Courtesy Bruno De Vecchi).



Figure 19 Memorial of the Disappeared at the CDHDF (Courtesy Bruno De Vecchi).

Contrary to the intended function of this memorial, at present it does not work as a place of memory. When I asked the people interviewed for this thesis about places of remembrance for the disappeared, none, including the members of Eureka, remembered this memorial. After being asked directly about the memorial, they referred to it as an honest gesture of someone in solidarity with their struggle, but not as a place they would use to connect with their disappeared relatives. Even though disappearances in the country can be counted per tens of thousands and the CDHDF has hosted countless events on the matter, the memorial has not been updated nor has it been used to raise awareness about disappearances. There is currently no one at the Commission in charge of it, it is not mentioned on its webpage, and there are no signs leading to it inside the building. Beyond the articles found online about its creation and its new opening, there is not much written about this memorial (Salgado n.d.; CDHDF 2006; 'Tendrá La CDHDF En Sus Instalaciones Memorial de Los Desaparecidos' n.d.).

As argued by Barsalou and Baxter, the process of creation of memorials is fundamental for their later impact (Barsalou and Baxter 2007). In this case, even though the memorial at the CDHDF was an important gesture by someone close to Eureka and counted with the support of the collective, it was not a demand that emerged from them. In the discussion around FEMOSPP and around the transitional justice measures more broadly, Eureka's main demands remained the return alive of the disappeared and the prosecution of those responsible for the crimes. The idea of a place to keep the memory of the disappeared was also present, but in conjunction with a place to talk about the collective's history of struggle. It is precisely that idea which gave birth to the House of Indomitable Memory analysed below.

For Jelin and Langland there is also value in analysing the cases of memorials that have 'failed' in becoming memory spaces. The authors mention the counter-marks of other groups or the lack of legitimation by the state as reasons for a memorial to fail in their aim (Jelin and Langland 2002). In a moment in which different memories were being publicly contested, the CDHDF offered a symbolic space for the memories of the relatives, but by not linking it to its wider work, it has failed to serve as a memory realm. The failure of this memorial seems to be more related to the lack of a social will to remember both in the wider society and within the CDHDF than to the reasons proposed by Jelin and Langland. According to Beristain, memorials can be comforting for the victims if they find them useful for social remembering, and if they are living places with activities in defense of human rights. Nonetheless, their value is only relative and momentary if they are not part of a wider process, as is the case of this memorial (Beristain 2012, 92–93). The relatives of the disappeared, who as I show have been the carriers of those memories, did not engage with this particular memorial because it did not emerge from their demands.



### 6.2.2 Indomitable Memory House Museum<sup>88</sup>

The House of Indomitable Memory serves as a memory realm that offers Eureka's own version of the disappearances for political reasons from the late 1960s. As Sylvia Karl explains:

There is no official commemoration of any of the events of the dirty war, nor are the crimes against humanity committed during this war part of government discourse, the school curriculum, or national or museum culture. Few publications on the matter exist, and there is hardly any mention of the dirty war in official television or radio programs; only a few critical newspapers write about it. Certain power holders are eager to erase the memory of this war by ignoring the historical facts of the victims (Karl 2014a, 736).

With this panorama, and in a context in which a version of what had happened during those years was being produced by the government through FEMOSPP, Eureka decided to create its own space in which it would share its story in its own terms. As Huysen argues, the past is past and will not change, but its meanings are in permanent change, so how this past is transmitted can and will affect the future. Thus, the struggle is not over what the past was, but over what it will be (Huysen in Oglesby 2007; Huysen 2003). The House was conceived as a vehicle of memory for the stories of the disappeared, of the state violence, and of the committee to be guarded and transmitted to new generations (Jelin 2003b). Transmission to younger generations is an essential matter for linking the past with the future, and because of that the battles over what should be transmitted is central (Grandin 2000; Kaiser 2005a; Agosin 2011). The importance of the past is precisely its active existence in the present, and that is precisely the reason for these battles (Kaiser 2005a). This is true in general, but in a country where disappearances not only took place in the past but are still being committed on a daily basis, how that first period of disappearances is presented does have an impact on how the disappearances of today are understood. The role of the House in transmitting a counter memory is then essential for building a present discourse on disappearances that questions the way in which different governments have portrayed themselves.

Rosario Ibarra's close relationship with Andrés Manuel López Obrador, at the time chief of the government of Mexico City, allowed them to get access to a space in which to locate the Museo Casa de la Memoria Indómita. This close relationship was the result of a decades-long relationship between the Committee and the left in Mexico, and particularly in terms of its relationship with the PRD. Eureka then had a less critical stance towards the Federal District's governments after 1997, year in which the PRD won the country's capital when elections started to be celebrated in this city.

The colonial house in which the museum is placed was given in commodate (gratuitous loan) to the Eureka Committee by Mexico City's government in 2005. With this act, the local PRD government

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<sup>88</sup> As part of H.I.J.O.S. México I was involved in the creation of the Casa de la Memoria Indómita. This section was written with the knowledge I have for having been an active participant in this process, but also with documents consulted and interviews made in Mexico City during my fieldwork to complement the information.

chose the story it would support. Mainly due to economic reasons, the house was not used for several years, as the committee did not have the funds to refurbish it. Comodate means that the recipient can have the space without paying rent, but the space has to be put to use, so the local government put pressure on the Committee to start the works; refurbishment started in 2009 and the House was finally opened in 2012. The Committee hired a professional curator with experience in exhibitions on human rights for the creation of the main exhibition. Responding to his invitation, H.I.J.O.S. participated as well.

The place in which the House is located does not have a particular connection to disappearances or state violence in general. The process of reappropriation of spaces connected to repression that has taken place in other countries such as Chile and Argentina where clandestine prisons or detention camps have been turned into memory spaces has not occurred in Mexico (Jelin and Langland 2002; Otálvaro-hormillosa 2013; Michael J. Lazzara 2002; Lerer 2013; Andermann and Hite 2015; Bianchini 2014; Aguilar n.d.). In Mexico there has not been a process of public acknowledgement of what these spaces were used for and there has not been a political will to transform them into memory spaces, so even though different organisations have pointed them out for decades, some are still in use to this date (Draper 2012). For example, as presented in Chapter 4, H.I.J.O.S. and Eureka have constantly organised actions outside the Military Camp No.1 to denounce its illegal uses, but it remains in use (De los Ríos 2009; Patxe 2011; Petrich 2011).

The way in which the House is configured speaks of the battles for memory in which it is inserted and of the meanings that the space wants to transmit. The space is divided in several sections: the main exhibition rooms and a room for temporary exhibitions are located on the first floor, the patio where a wide range of events are hosted and the café are located on the ground floor. The main exhibition consists of a room with an art exhibition with plaques hanging from the ceiling with the names and date of disappearance of the 557 persons Eureka has on their list; a room on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of October of 1968 and the 10<sup>th</sup> of June of 1971 are followed by a room where the 'México rosa', a Mexico portrayed by the government and represented in the media in the 1970s as a country in peace and rapidly developing, is contrasted by videos by the DFS where they explain their 'intelligence tactics'. A few objects covered in resin and representing the objects of the disappeared that are left hanging, suspended waiting for the return of their owners, are followed by a small room with 21 white strings representing the 21 Latin American countries that suffered state-sponsored terrorism during the last century. After this, in a black room with just a chair and a light, audios with testimonies of people who suffered torture represent the conditions in which the disappeared were being held captive.

In an interview, curator Ignacio Vázquez reflected on how he felt compelled to include accounts of torture in this room, as these stories are not as well known in Mexico as in other countries like Argentina, where this room would probably have been redundant (I. Vázquez 2015). It is interesting to note that those who were disappeared and then freed do not have the prominence in this site as they do in other memory spaces elsewhere, where they have been consulted for the creation and

discourse to be transmitted in the space or where they even serve as guides of the spaces (Schindel 2014; Michael J. Lazzara 2002; De Vecchi Gerli 2010). Their presence is only through their accounts of torture, which serves to illustrate the conditions endured by the disappeared. This reflects Eureka's decision to put the focus on the stories of the disappeared and of their relatives.

When leaving this room, visitors enter a room imitating one of the *Doñas'* living rooms, with pictures of the disappeared on the wall, an armchair, and a phone symbolising the eternal waiting. H.I.J.O.S.'s main contribution to the house is a room with the faces of the people responsible for the disappearances with white and black stripe suits and in cages representing the prisons they would be in if a process of justice had taken place. The biggest room is covered with posters of Eureka's actions and with a big picture of the *Doñas* in a march. Rosario Ibarra's typewriter at the centre of the room represents her active role in creating connections for the struggle. When the exhibition was originally created in 2012, H.I.J.O.S. also contributed with an installation linking the disappeared and the struggles from the 1960s onwards to the current situation regarding disappearances. A wall with the eyes of the disappeared sent by different organisations of more recent disappearances, a notebook with handwritten names of the disappeared registered by Eureka and other organisations, a pencil for visitors to add names of people disappeared, and an eraser in case the disappeared return, marked the end of the exhibition. In the wall opposite, H.I.J.O.S. displayed the names and contact details of organisations working against disappearances.

A big stencil made by Oaxacan street art collective Lapiztola that portrays an indigenous woman hugging a shadow and surrounded by birds in the first floor, and the pictures of the *Doñas* who have passed away in the ground floor, complete the museum (Karl 2014a; Wolff Rojas 2014). There is almost no text in the rooms and visitors have to have a guided tour of the place. The political vision of those disappeared is brought up in the representation of the waiting room with books they used to read, and is highlighted during the guided tour.



Figure 20 Rosario Ibarra poses outside the House, in front of a picture of the first hunger strike held in 1978 (Redacción AN 2012).



Figure 21 The waiting room at the Indomitable Memory House Museum (Sistema de Información Cultural n.d.).



Figure 22 Eureka's posters, banners, and pictures at the Indomitable Memory House (Secretaría de Turismo de CDMX n.d.).



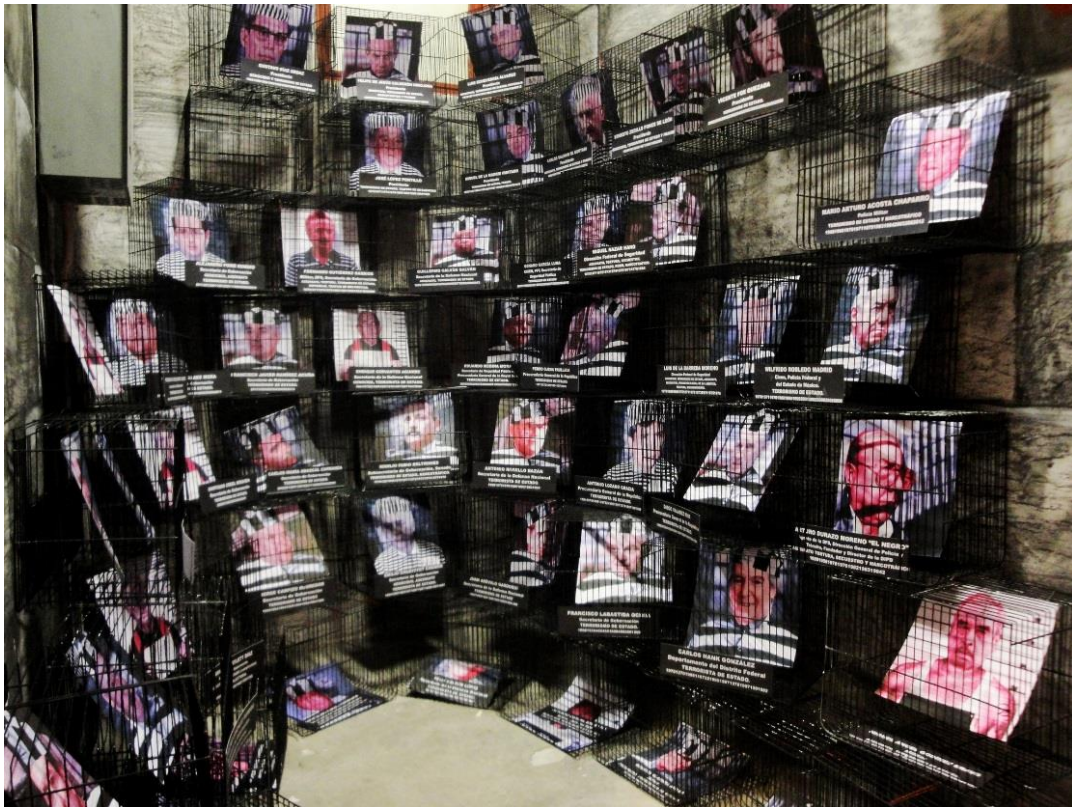


Figure 23 People identified by H.I.J.O.S. as responsible for the disappearances of previous decades are symbolically put behind bars (Jiménez n.d.).



Figure 24 The eyes of people disappeared from 2006 look back at the visitor at the Indomitable Memory House (Jiménez n.d.).

If when the project was created Eureka did not know what would happen with FEMOSPP and what the transitional justice measures would mean (although they were critical of the process), when the museum started to be built the failure of those measures in terms of the rights to the truth, justice, reparation and non-repetition were clear. The creation of this House became therefore a new chapter in the battles for memory that Eureka has sustained with different governments since its creation in 1977. As I have presented above, the Committee has always insisted that the government was responsible for disappearances. As a response to failed transitional justice measures that in the end guaranteed impunity and silence, Eureka created a space of living memory. Thus, this space serves as a vehicle to transmit Eureka's memory. The main topics portrayed are the national and regional historical background of the disappearances, the political character of the crimes, the government's responsibility for the crimes, the double discourse the government had during the 1970s, and the necessity of social justice in order to obtain legal justice. Besides this, the consequences of disappearances, the struggles of the people who were disappeared, their principles and their passions, and the dignity of the decades-long struggle against disappearances are also part of what is transmitted in the House.

As I have argued before, the *Doñas* have served as carriers of memory. Following Sturken I argue that they embodied those memories for decades and were responsible for making them become public (Sturken 1997). Eureka created this House to hold and transmit that memory in response to the fact that the *Doñas* were beginning to pass away or become old, which made it more difficult for them to continue with their role as memory entrepreneurs. By giving the *Doñas* a central role in the exhibition and in the discourse it promotes, the House acknowledges their central role in these battles for memory. The past is looked at with eyes from the present (Lessa 2013) and then combined and recombined in the service of the interests of the present (Theidon 2003; Gómez-Barris 2009). In this sense, the House serves as a space to perpetuate Eureka's discourse, but also their legacy of struggle more generally.

But along with the battles for memory and the discourses that are transmitted against the official silences, the House has also been a site where the memories of the two periods of disappearances have first been in contestation and finally have come to coexist. When the House was conceived in the mid-2000s, the situation on disappearances was completely different to the one in 2012, when the works on the House started. The idea that members of Eureka had about the House did not include the disappearances of more recent years. In this regard, H.I.J.O.S. played a key role as a pivotal organisation between the two periods. As previously mentioned, one of the contributions of H.I.J.O.S. to the house aimed at linking the exhibition and disappearances from previous decades and the work of Eureka to those more recent disappearances and to the organisations working at the moment of the House's opening. Following a decision by the team in charge of the space this section was altered. Instead of H.I.J.O.S.' installation, the team in charge of the House placed an archive with information of one of the disappeared from the 1970s. Jorge Gálvez, Director of the space and Ibarra's son-in-law, affirmed in an interview that the decisions had been made as people were too

upset when finishing the tour with the news of tens of thousands of disappeared people and it was better just to conclude with the story the House was telling (Gálvez Girón 2015). But the decision was probably also informed by his position on the two periods of disappearances.

According to Gálvez, the two periods of disappearances are very different in their characteristics and the reasons of the disappearances, but also in terms of how the relatives have organised themselves and the decisions they have taken on how to deal with the government and the demands they put forward. In this sense, leaving out the part on the new organisations and more recent disappearances was probably a way of marking a distance and making Eureka's discourse more prominent. As this shows, and as I have suggested in previous chapters, the battles for memory analysed by Jelin occur not only between the government and the dissident voices, but also between different organisations and between different periods of disappearances (Jelin 2003b).

This House is then a dominated realm of memory as conceived by Nora, in which the silence from the state regarding disappearances in Mexico in the two periods is contested, and memories are constantly created and resignified, and which serves as a refuge and a place of living memory (Nora 2008). Although the main exhibition does not deal with the issue of recent disappearances, temporary exhibitions and events held in the patio do address them. As Schindel claims regarding sites of memory in Argentina, the House is now a 'node of cultural, social and political action' (Schindel 2014, 247). Focusing on the struggle for the disappeared for political reasons, the House has become a site to reflect about social and political issues more broadly. The House was at risk of portraying a literal memory. As Todorov explains, sometimes groups argue that 'their' event is unique and act as if comparing it with others would make it lose its importance. Nonetheless, to advance in the understanding of the events, they should be compared and linked. The use of events as exemplary memories allows for the articulation of the past and the present 'to use the lessons from injustices suffered before to fight for those that are committed today' (Todorov 2000, 32). The House now works as exemplary memory by connecting different memories and by being an illustration of something bigger that can help understand and even overcome other cases.

### 6.2.3 Plaque Remembering Rosendo Radilla

A third memorial regarding the disappearances of the first period is the plaque installed in Atoyac de Álvarez, Guerrero, as part of the Inter American Court of Human Rights' (IACoHR) ruling in 2009 for the Rosendo Radilla case against the Mexican state. Rosendo Radilla Pacheco was a peasant disappeared by the Mexican Army in Guerrero in 1974. At the time of his detention at a military checkpoint, the explanation given to his relatives was that he composed *corridos* (ballads). As explained in chapter 3, rural guerrilla in Guerrero counted with an important social support base, which was also repressed by the army in order to finish the guerrillas. Rosendo Radilla composed *corridos* about social and political issues in Guerrero and is one of the cases of how the army also disappeared those who supported the guerrillas. Radilla was last seen at the Military barracks in

Atoyac, 'with signs of physical abuse' (Inter-American Court of Human Rights 2009, 37). After exhausting all the national legal paths to find the whereabouts of Mr. Radilla, his relatives, founding members of AFADEM, with the accompaniment of the CMDPDH searched for an international resolution of the case in what Karl defines as '(o)ne of the most emblematic and visible struggles for the rehumanization of a disappeared person' (Karl 2014a, 10). The case was submitted to the Commission in 2001, and in 2009, the Mexican state was found guilty of Mr. Radilla's enforced disappearance. The 'verdict required the Mexican state to clarify the whereabouts of Radilla and, in the event of his death, to carry out exhumations, hand over the human remains to the family, pay reparations to them, offer a public apology, put up a commemorative plaque in honour of Radilla in a public space and abolish the military's jurisdiction regarding crimes committed by members of the armed forces' (Karl 2014b; Inter-American Court of Human Rights 2009).

Even though it could be argued, as established in the ruling itself, that the ruling was restorative for the relatives, as it showed a reality long ignored by the government, the process following the ruling did indeed revictimise and made even more invisible the relatives (Dutrénit Bielous 2014, 85, 94; Sánchez Serrano n.d., 4). As I will show below, the setting up of the plaque and the process of implementing the ruling are an example of the dehumanising policies of memory carried out by the Mexican government, which are created to respond more to an international mandate to remember than to an actual will of change and of guaranteeing that the crimes will not happen again. The way in which the Mexican government complied with the ruling meant that the rights to truth, justice and the guarantee of non-repetition were not complied with. As Beristain explains, memorials can only be comforting for the victims when they are part of a broader way of dealing with the human rights violations and of wider measures that help develop better life conditions (Beristain 2012, 92), which has not been the case with the compliance of the Radilla ruling. In terms of the truth, as I further analyse below, the Mexican state did not ensure the provision of a complete version of the facts, and, above all, the whereabouts of Mr. Radilla have not been established. Mr. Radilla has not been searched for properly in places where witnesses have informed there were clandestine mass graves (Sánchez Serrano n.d., 4; Karl 2014b, 10). Even though the ruling has already shown that the Mexican state, through the army, disappeared people, to properly look for Radilla could shed light on the systematic character of these crimes. In terms of justice, the crimes are still in impunity. The Military files on this case have not been disclosed and no one has been held accountable (Sánchez Serrano n.d.). Although the ruling has pushed for a change in the justice code, which implies that military abuses have to be seen by civil courts, the impact of this is still to be seen (Sánchez Serrano n.d.; Dutrénit Bielous 2014; 'Quitan El Fuero Militar En Desaparición Forzada' 2014).

In terms of the right to the truth, the Radilla case illustrates the Mexican government's tendency to maintain in silence the memories of state violence and disappearances of the 1960s onwards. Similar to what happened with the report elaborated by FEMOSPP in which the crimes against humanity committed by the Mexican government were described but then hidden from public opinion, the documents produced to comply with the IACoHR, have not been made public. The Ministry of Interior



prepared a bibliographical sketch as part of the IACoHR's ruling with inputs from the Radilla family, AFADEM and the CMDPDH, which aimed to vindicate the life and dignity of Mr. Radilla, which was supposed to be used as a step to 'the recovery and reestablishment of the historical memory within a democratic society' (Inter-American Court of Human Rights 2009).

The tone of the biography is very critical of the different governments, drawing attention to the reasons of the armed movements and to the daily occurrence of human rights violations, as we can see in the following quotes: 'the ignominious decade of the 1970s was then initiated with a brutal violation to the principles of human life. The people had lost all rights to work, life, education, health, culture, property and public safety. It seemed that historical memory wanted to be vanished: to kill the ideas of a whole people with a history of fight against corrupt representatives. (...) Violation to human rights was a daily act' (p. 16). 'The will of justice took the form of the demand of a wider participation in consume and better health and education services' (p. 15). 'From the early 1970s, under Luis Echeverría Álvarez and José López Portillo's governments, militarisation and state repression got worse every time, using torture, enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings to repress dissidence' (p. 40) (Secretaría de Gobernación 2012, 15, 16, 38, 40). The biography, in which SEGOB acknowledges the illegal and widespread state violence that took place in Guerrero and elsewhere in the country, is not available in governmental websites.

Within the official websites, all there is in this regard is a photo album and a press release of the launch event ('Presentación Del Libro 'Señores, Soy Campesino. Semblanza de Rosendo Radilla Pacheco. Desaparecido' 2013; Gobernación n.d.). The event where the biography was presented, which took place in March 2013, was kept relatively quiet despite of the family's insistence that it should be made public and publicised widely. Furthermore, after a last minute change of location, many of the attendees could not reach the place. At the launch ceremony, the Secretary of Interior affirmed that 'this is not a time to be stuck in the past', showing the government's position regarding this crime (Díaz 2013a).

Instead of being used as a vehicle of memory about the disappearances of the 1970s in Guerrero and about Mr. Radilla's life, the book has been forgotten. This case shows once more how the memory policies carried out by PAN and PRI federal governments have perpetrated oblivion and silence instead of creating structural change. The 'silence is golden rule' used in many transitions because it implies a lower political cost has been applied in this case (Bilbija and Payne 2011). In order to guard its image as a democratic country respectful of human rights, the Mexican government implemented certain actions to comply with the IACoHR's ruling, but without actually guaranteeing the rights behind the ruling. As mentioned before, fully implementing this ruling would lead to an investigation of the state structures that allowed these crimes to be committed, investigating the political elites and the army, as well as investigating and punishing those state actors that prevented truth and justice. As some authors show, silence acts as a contrary to memory, but interacts with it dynamically (Jelin 2003b; Bilbija and Payne 2011). Like the CNDH and FEMOSPP, the actions following the measures

implemented after the IACoHR's ruling on Rosendo Radilla have followed a pattern in which following an imperative to remember and to deal with past crimes, the federal government creates a narrative acknowledging human rights violations. Nonetheless, as this narrative fundamentally contradicts the grand narrative constructed by different governments, it is not placed at the centre of their action, as this would involve deep accountability actions. The memory that is created to comply with an international mandate is then silenced by those who created it.

In terms of the relationship with the victims, which Beristain highlights as fundamental for memory policies to be effective, the treatment that the relatives of Mr. Radilla have received has revictimised them instead of transforming their quality of life (Beristain 2012). This can be illustrated with two actions: the unveiling of a plaque in Atoyac remembering Mr. Radilla, and the process of dealing with the monetary compensation included in the ruling. Regarding the former, the ruling states that a plaque should be installed in Atoyac de Álvarez to remember Mr. Radilla and to acknowledge the state's responsibility in the crime. The event of unveiling the plaque, in November 2011, which should have been a reparatory act for the family was instead one that served mainly a foreign affairs objective. The relatives had asked that Minister of Interior unveil the plaque. Four days before the event they were notified that he was not going to be at the ceremony after which the relatives announced that they also would not be present at the event. The Minister died in a helicopter accident the day after that. After this, the Ministry decided that the Minister of Foreign Affairs would attend the ceremony (Díaz 2013b). As the petition of the relatives to postpone the ceremony was not heard, the relatives, AFADEM, and the CMDPDH maintained their decision of not participating in the event, which took place nevertheless. An act that should have been reparatory for the families was then carried out without them. The Calderón administration dealt with the issue as a foreign affairs issue more than as a human rights and memory issues, which would have placed the victims at the centre.



Figure 25 Relatives of Rosendo Radilla pose with members of social organisations on his birthday (2017) ('Recuerdan a Rosendo Radilla Desaparecido Durante La Guerra Sucia' 2017).

The plaque reads:

The Mexican state unveils this plaque to the memory of Don Rosendo Radilla and of the victims of enforced disappearances occurred during the 1960s and 1970s, in a 'context of systematic violations to human rights', as pointed by the Inter American Court on Human Rights. This is in compliance with the ruling of said Court in the Rosendo Radilla v. Estados Unidos Mexicanos case due to his enforced disappearance by agents of the state on the 25<sup>th</sup> of August of 1974, in a military checkpoint in this locality. This sad event has left invaluable lessons to the Mexican Nation. The state acknowledges the tireless struggle for justice, truth, and reparation carried out by his relatives. Atoyac de Álvarez, Guerrero, 14 November 2011

The plaque can be understood as a dominant memory realm. According to Nora, those are places built because memory would not exist on its own. In this case, the necessity to create a memory realm does not come from state actors, but from the push of civil society through an international human rights body. Nonetheless, contrary to dominated places of memory that constitute a refuge for living memory -as the case of the House of Indomitable Memory- dominant places are cold and imposed from above, generally by a national authority and have the solemnity of official ceremonies (Nora 2008, 38). The aesthetics of the plaque as well as the ceremony to unveil it show the coldness of these dominant memory realms. Nonetheless, as the picture above shows, relatives of Rosendo Radilla as well as local social organisations have used the plaque as a place to remember and honour him.

The victimisation of the relatives continued when the cheques issued by the Ministry of Interior to

comply with the monetary compensation for the disappearance of Rosendo Radilla, were emitted under the disappeared's name. In order to cash them and accessing the compensation, the relatives needed to file for a declaration of absence followed by the presumption of death. As I have explained in chapter 2, this declaration and the presumption of death can deeply affect the relatives who in this case were not willing to do this.<sup>89</sup> Besides this, the fact that the figures of the reparations were made public in national newspapers further endangered the relatives.

The relatives' battle for rehumanising the disappeared clashes with the constant dehumanisation carried out by the state. With its actions, the Mexican state reinforces the idea (analysed in chapter 5) of the disappeared being ungrievable lives (Butler 2012). As shown above, being a fundamental step in terms of the struggle of the relatives of the disappeared, the ruling of the IACoHR did not change the reality of enforced disappearances in the country. A government that had militarisation of the territory at the core of its internal policy, did only the minimum to comply with a ground breaking ruling, therefore the reparatory effect of their actions is questionable. Karl analyses the local impact of the ruling and shows it has also created tensions between relatives of the disappeared organised in AFADEM and other relatives organised in other groups or not organised, who have felt that their cases were left out. Even though the plaque refers to the disappeared in general, the Mexican government did not work at the community level to include other cases in the ceremonies (Karl 2014a). As Dutrénit argues, even after this important ruling, disappearances from the 1960s are still largely unknown (Dutrénit Bielous 2014).

#### **6.2.4 Square of the Disappeared**

The Memorial to the Disappeared in Monterrey, Nuevo León helps to illustrate the battles for memory around the disappeared in the second period of disappearances in the country. This site serves to analyse the battles between the government and the organisations, but also the differences in the discourses between local organisations searching for the disappeared.

Enforced disappearances had already occurred in Nuevo León in the 1970s and 1980s and started to occur again in alarming numbers in the late 2000s. It was in this context that FUNDENL, an organisation of relatives of the disappeared and people in solidarity with them, was founded.<sup>90</sup>

On the 11 of January 2014, the third anniversary of Roy Rivera Hidalgo's disappearance, FUNDENL symbolically occupied a semi-abandoned square in the centre of the city.<sup>91</sup> In a communiqué to the

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<sup>89</sup> The issue of reparations has been deeply analysed and discussed within relatives of the disappeared. As Karl shows, there are different positions in this regard. The context and the process in which these compensations are proposed are of main importance. It is fundamental that they are carried out within a broader process of memory, truth and justice, and not seen as the main point in a process (Sánchez Serrano n.d., 4; Karl 2014a, 734; Reátegui 2012).

<sup>90</sup> FUNDENL is one of the seven cases analysed in Chapter 4.

<sup>91</sup> For the story of Roy and his mother Leticia Hidalgo, see: Bosch 2015.

state governor, which was read on the date of the square's occupation, FUNDENL stated that they had decided to occupy this space permanently and inscribe the names of their disappeared loved ones as they had not received answers from the state government regarding the search of their relatives. The names of the disappeared and the date when they were disappeared were stuck on to a big glass structure. To complete the intervention of the square, a metal plaque with the poem 'Transparency of the Eve' was installed in the square after a few weeks in the place where a plaque remembering the bullfighters of Nuevo León had previously been (Mesta 2014). The poem on the plaque, by Rodrigo Guajardo, reads (translated):

Transparent, not invisible  
 the wish of seeing you come back does not go away  
 it sings on the edges of this firm fragility  
 in the open air,  
 water to touch that quenches  
 those thirsts with a presence.

Our patience is active  
 and we wait on guard.  
 A vehement patience protects us  
 against despair.

Our hope comes out into the sun every day,  
 and calls light by its name.

We summon the following people  
 (whom we have not seen in a long time)  
 to remove their own name from the wall,  
 with their own hand,

Until all transparency is recovered.  
 Because we are waiting for you: together, with you,  
 We are the ones creating hope.  
 We want you back: we love you here.  
 The Awaiters. Monterrey, N.L. 11 January 2014

In the communiqué released when the square was symbolically occupied, FUNDENL expressed:

This space is not a memorial. It does not try to bury the cases. It will be, the sculpture and the square, a physical presence that will shout to the authorities, every day, the historical debt they have with all the disappeared persons and with society in general. Each one of the names will be removed when together we find the disappeared to whom that name pertains, until the square is empty and the sculpture is transparent, as the work of the authorities should be (FUNDENL 2014b).

With the communiqué, FUNDENL makes clear that this square is occupied to send a message to the government for them to look for the disappeared and to end corruption. The symbolic presence of the disappeared in the square is a reminder of the inefficacy of the government and of its responsibility in disappearances. As I have previously shown, the governments' discourse around the disappeared during the second period blames mainly organised crime for these crimes and implies that the victims were involved in illegal activities, which would be the reason why they were disappeared and why investigations on their whereabouts are not taking place. With their activities -the symbolic occupation

being one of their most visible ones- FUNDENL reiterates the responsibility of the state and also works for the rehumanisation of the disappeared.

In the communiqué, FUNDENL argues that this is not a memorial as it will not bury the cases. The idea behind this sentence is probably that memorials are made, as Smith shows in the case of a memorial set up in Guatemala City, to close the discussion on a topic (P. Smith 2001). Against this, FUNDENL created a living realm of memory. The decisions on the symbolism of the place were made carefully. As Leticia Hidalgo (FUNDENL) told me, they researched memorials elsewhere in order to create something that transmitted what they were looking for. Their inspiration came from the 'Memorial in Remembrance of the Detained Disappeared' in Montevideo, Uruguay, which is in turn inspired in the memorial to the victims of the Vietnam War located in Washington, DC (Hidalgo Rea 2015; 'Memorial En Recordación de Los Detenidos Desaparecidos' 2014). As Huyssen shows for the Argentinean case and the lessons that Argentine activists have learned from the memorialisation of the Holocaust, this memorial illustrates how memory realms mobilise memories in other places as well (Huyssen 2003).

The study of 'mnemonic dynamics unfolding across and beyond boundaries' proposed by Erll also allows us to understand these processes of memory in Mexico and the influence that other similar stories elsewhere have on it (Erll 2011, 15). The fact that the Square of the Disappeared in Monterrey draws inspiration from a memorial from Uruguay, which is in turn inspired by another memorial also speaks of the different contexts in which the relatives of the disappeared of the two periods have carried out their struggles. The prominent conversation on memory, as Lessa points out, has been growing for decades. According to the author, the interest in the processes of memory from Latin America sparked a great wave of memory studies that continues to this date (Lessa 2013, 16). The creation of memorials was probably not part of the conversation when the relatives of the disappeared in Mexico started looking for their loved ones in the 1970s, but it is part of the conversation now. From states trying to set up memorials to international bodies acknowledging their role in reparation processes, this is an issue present for the relatives of the disappeared of the second period, who can learn about the stories of relatives elsewhere and build from them. As with the specialised language and the legal frameworks on disappearances, the work that Latin American relatives of the disappeared of the first period have done also informs the struggles of the relatives of the second period.

While representing the horror of disappearances, the space has been created to embody the hope of the return of the disappeared and the active search for each one of them. The names of the disappeared are written in green ink, symbolising hope, and will be erased when each disappeared person comes back. As expressed in the communiqué, if all of them return, the glass will be transparent, 'as the work of the authorities should be' (FUNDENL 2014b). Against the dehumanisation of the vague figures presented by the government on disappearances of the mid-2000s onwards, the names and date of disappearance of the relatives of those organised in FUNDENL are written in the

memorial. Besides this, the faces of the disappeared have been painted in the square. If disappearances mean a continuous absence, the square gives the disappeared a permanent presence.

In this sense, it is important to reflect on how much can the relatives of the disappeared and even survivors say about disappearances. As with the reflection Primo Levi makes with the Nazi concentration camps, the relatives of the disappeared and even those persons who were disappeared and got their freedom back can only speak about disappearance to a certain extent. It is precisely because they did not live through the entire process that they can talk about it (Levi in Sarlo 2005, 43). Nonetheless, the relatives of the disappeared can and do talk about the absence of their loved ones and about the social implication of that absence. The role of memorials and other kinds of representations has to do with apprehending that reality that has uncertainty and absence at its core.



Figure 26 Relatives of the disappeared organised in FUNDENL at the Square of the Disappeared (Abrego 2017).





Figure 27 Alejandro Moreno Baca's parents stand by the memorial at the Square of the Disappeared.<sup>92</sup>

As Gatti points out, disappearances are a breakage of meaning that is resisted with the actions of what he calls 'activists of meaning'. In this case, with FUNDENL's creation of their own space, which serves not to mourn the disappeared, but to keep on fighting to find them, FUNDENL works on giving meaning to the disappearance and provides a space for those present absences and for the production of meanings (Gatti 2014). Similar to the case of the House of Indomitable Memory, it is the relatives as memory entrepreneurs who have to create these spaces as realms of memory because there is no social will to remember. Members of FUNDENL interviewed for this work spoke of the great meaning that this space has, and how it works for them in many different ways: as a denunciation of the disappearance of their loved ones, as a space for remembering them, but also as a place for social action. During the fieldwork carried out for this work in Chihuahua, Nuevo León, Coahuila, Guanajuato, and Mexico City, this was the only place mentioned by relatives of the disappeared as a memory space for their loved ones. Nonetheless, it was mainly the relatives organised in FUNDENL who recognised this place as their own. Further research could shed light on how this space is signified by other collectives in the city and by passers-by.

<sup>92</sup> Alejandro Moreno Baca was disappeared on the 27th January, 2011 (Javier García 2017). More on his case can be found at: Solera 2015.



The Square is then not only a site to put pressure on the government because of its inactivity searching for the disappeared, but it is what Nora defines as a dominated memory realm, a place that is alive with social actions and that serves as a refuge while creating meanings and solidarity (Nora 2008). FUNDENL uses the space to organise embroidery sessions as part of the ‘embroideries for peace’ project and to take DNA samples of relatives of the disappeared for the creation of a citizenship-led DNA database (*Bordados de Paz, Memoria y Justicia: Un Proceso de Visibilización*, n.d.; A. Vázquez 2015; Rizzo 2015). The collective commemorates there the anniversaries of disappearances or birthdays of the disappeared, organises cultural activities around disappearances, and uses the space as a symbolic place to start or end the marches. Even when the memorial does not include a clear description of its aims or those responsible for its creation, it is with the constant use of the site that memories are produced and circulated. This is in stark contrast with the memorial at the CDHDF, which, as stated above, does not include a description and, not being appropriated or regularly used, does not work as a vehicle for memory. As Robledo affirms, memory initiatives that result from collective action articulate actions with a view to the future as they make possible new practices around the events remembered (Robledo Silvestre 2015b, 87).



Figure 28 People reattach the names of the disappeared to the glass structure at the Square of the Disappeared in April, 2014 (Ramírez Atilano 2015).



*Figure 29 Relatives of the disappeared take DNA samples for the citizen-led DNA bank in May 2017 at the Square of the Disappeared (A. Vázquez 2015).*

With the Square of the Disappeared, FUNDENL has created their own space to challenge the discourse of the local government. While the former insists on their work with civil society (mainly CADHAC), which has been praised by international organisations, FUNDENL reminds society that the disappeared have not been found and that impunity is still the rule. Thus, the events held in the Square represent part of the battles of memory for the disappeared that occur at the local level. Even though there was not a confrontation when the names were placed, the names of the disappeared were removed from the glass months after the creation of the memorial. Although who exactly erased them is unknown, FUNDENL blamed the local government of having done so. According to FUNDENL, the state government replied saying this was an act of vandalism, and not a government action. FUNDENL stuck the names again and published the communiqué 'Government of Nuevo León destroys names of desaparecidos'. In this text, FUNDENL affirmed that they would put the names back as many times as necessary. For the collective, the erasure of the names showed how uncomfortable the government is about this memory space (J. González 2014; FUNDENL 2014a).

By remembering FUNDENL's disappeared loved ones and integrating a wider reflection on violence and human rights violations, the Square allows the past to become 'a principle of action for the present' (Todorov 1996, 14). While at its inception the square was planned as a place to remember the disappeared from Monterrey, it now serves as a space of exemplary memory. FUNDENL has made the connection between the disappeared in Nuevo León and the rest of the country in the first and second periods. Even though the memorial does not include a link to disappearances that occurred in past decades or to disappearances on a larger scale in Mexico, that link is made in their

events (Huerta Tarrega 2015). Also, the space has served to remember other events, mainly the case of the 43 disappeared students of Ayotzinapa.

### 6.2.5 Memorial in Allende, Coahuila

If the memorial in Monterrey has worked for creating an active and critical memory, the memorial in Allende, Coahuila, has served to perpetuate the local government's narrative. In the municipality of Allende, Coahuila, at least 300 persons were disappeared during March 2011, presumably by members of the organised crime group Los Zetas with the collaboration of the Municipal Police and the acquiescence of the army. The local media did not report the events fearing reprisals, until 2013. In 2014, an official investigation was launched, which concluded that 27 persons (not 300) had been disappeared (Osorno 2016, n.d.; Noel 2017; Martínez Ahrens 2016; Thompson 2017). The organisation 'Alas de Esperanza' ('Wings of Hope') formed by relatives of the victims was created after the events became public. This organisation first stated that the number of people disappeared during the events was actually 45, for later saying it was 27 (Montenegro 2016; 'Rectifica Alas de Esperanza Sobre Desaparecidos En Allende - El Diario de Coahuila' 2016). Other organisations still argue that between 100 and 300 persons were disappeared. As a result of the events, between 32 and 70 properties were destroyed and 10,000 people fled the municipality of Allende (FIDH et al., n.d., 34). According to testimonies, the victims were killed and their bodies allegedly incinerated (Thompson 2017).

In 2015, four years after the events, the local government built a memorial at the entrance of the town. As I argue here, the memorial has served to further the local government's narrative on the 'War on Drugs'.<sup>93</sup> According to informal conversations sustained during fieldwork and afterwards with relatives of the disappeared of Coahuila, the local authorities gave urns with soil to some of the relatives of people disappeared in Allende. This was done under the argument that as the disappeared had been killed and their bodies allegedly incinerated, the only thing their relatives would be able to have to remember them by was the soil of the place where the presumed killings took place. In the local government's discourse, faced with the lack of a body and of the possibility of finding one, the memorial would create a space for the relatives to mourn their loved ones.

This memorial is one of the few in Mexico that has been built in a place where disappearance took place.<sup>94</sup> In the ceremony held when the memorial started to be built in March 2015, Coahuila's

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<sup>93</sup> The 'Memorial to the Victims' (Memorial a las víctimas) placed in Campo Marte in Mexico City is another example of a memorial designed to further the official discourse around the 'War on Drugs'. The memorial has been the centre of several battles for memory. This case is not included in the thesis as it deals with victims in general and not only with disappearances (Robledo Silvestre 2015c, 2015b; Turati 2012b; 'Memorial a Las Víctimas de La Violencia Del Estado Mexicano' 2016).

<sup>94</sup> Two other memorials have been created in Tijuana, Baja California and Lagos de Moreno, Jalisco. For more on this, see: Robledo Silvestre 2014; L. P. Ovalle and Díaz Tovar 2014; Pagaza and Lucero n.d.; Suárez 2014; Souza and Franco 2017.

Governor Moreira said that the memorial represented four aims: the search for the disappeared, the punishment of those responsible for their disappearances, the Mexican state's effort to avoid the repetition of these crimes, and reconciliation ('Construyen Obelisco En Memoria de Los Desaparecidos de Allende, Coahuila. Seguirán Las Consignaciones.' 2016). In October 2015 when the memorial was inaugurated, the government blamed organised crime for the disappearances. At the ceremony, the governor asked the families of the disappeared grouped in 'Alas de Esperanza' for forgiveness and blamed the 'monster of drug trafficking, which has no loyalties' for the events. In turn, members of the organisation thanked the governor for his tenacity in the fight against insecurity and for creating a space where the names of the disappeared would not be lost ('Ofrece Disculpas RMV a Familiares de Allende' n.d.; Arellano 2015).

The violence that occurred in Allende has since then been used to shape a discourse of reconciliation and peace in a state where thousands are still disappeared and where new disappearances continue to take place. Scholars have affirmed that memorials can be used to further political agendas by materialising a particular memory (Robben 2005b; Drinot 2009b). In this case, Coahuila's government has used the memorial to advance an image of collaboration with civil society and preoccupation for the disappeared. A 'concert for peace' was organised in 2016, and governor Moreira was present at the military parade during the 206<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Mexican Independence in Allende, where he declared that 32 months had passed 'without murders between brothers'. Before the parade, authorities made an offering at the memorial. On the 30<sup>th</sup> of August 2017, the International Day for the Victims of Enforced Disappearances, the local government commemorated the disappeared in the state at the memorial in Allende along with relatives of the disappeared of Allende of the 'Alas de Esperanza' organisation. On the same day, relatives of the disappeared organised in FUUNDEC and Familias Unidas de Piedras Negras who did not feel represented by this event, held different events in Saltillo, Torreón and Piedras Negras (Gómez 2016; C. Sánchez 2016; L. Ramos 2016; *Periódico Zócalo* 2017). Relatives of the disappeared of 'Alas de Esperanza' have also organised commemorations of the events at the memorial, but other groups have not used it as a memory space. With this memorial, the massacre that was hidden by the government has been afterwards used as a vehicle for expressing its discourse through the memorial and through a close relationship with 'Alas de Esperanza'.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> For the relationship between the government and this organisation, see: 'Continúa Gobierno Trabajando Junto a "Alas de Esperanza"' 2017; *Milenio Digital* 2016; 'Avalan Colectivos Trabajo de Gobierno de Estado En Tema de Desaparecidos - El Diario de Coahuila' 2017; Díaz 2017b.



*Figure 30 The memorial in Allende, Coahuila (Redacción Sin Embargo n.d.).<sup>96</sup>*

The creation of this memorial is part of a bigger battle for memory that occurs at the local level in Coahuila. As has been shown in previous chapters, Coahuila is one of the states where the work of organisations of relatives of the disappeared, among them FUUNDEC, has been more prominent. Always with a critical and independent position towards the government, and with the support of human rights organisations, the relatives have influenced the legal framework on disappearances and the implementation of public policies in this matter. As previously mentioned, FUUNDEC has worked with international organisations to file a formal complaint at the International Criminal Court for the inefficacy of the local government and for its implication in human rights violations. While the government argues that the human rights violations were carried out by organised crime alone, the organisations have argued that they were part of a planned state policy. According to the report submitted to the International Criminal Court:

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<sup>96</sup> I was not able to find a description on the aesthetic decisions made for the creation of the memorial.

(...) crimes such as those committed around Allende (...) reveal the repetition of crimes carried out according to the same logic (acting of state forces in the name of the fight against organized crime in fact in favor of the interests of the group of the Zetas with the aim of ensuring their primacy and control of the territory of Coahuila), All (sic) this demonstrate the existence of a policy to commit such an attack (FIDH et al., n.d., 7).

The critical position of FUUNDEC and Familias Unidas of Piedras Negras can also be seen in their version of the responsibilities of the events in Allende. According to the same report, during the massacre in Allende, which lasted for days, 'the security forces acted in collaboration with the criminal group responsible for the crimes. Some evidence suggests that not only the mayor but also the governor of Coahuila would have had knowledge of such actions, and that their failure to act was due not to a lack of knowledge but rather to collusion with the criminal group' (FIDH et al., n.d., 8). As pointed out by Burke, the questions of '(w)ho wants whom to remember what and why? (And) Who wants whom to forget what and why?' helps us understand the battles for memory (in Kaiser 2005b). If in the first period the government wanted to hide the disappearances and furthered silence in that regard, the case of Coahuila illustrates a different strategy for the second period. When the events are already public, the local government acknowledges them. Nonetheless, by blaming organised crime of the events, the state's responsibility is silenced and impunity guaranteed. To the critical position of some of the organisations of relatives in the state, the local government responded creating a memorial that allows it to further its discourse (Robben 2005b). In this case, this is done in collaboration with a collective of relatives of the disappeared. In the battles over the representation of the state, the Coahuila government presents itself as an entity in defense of human rights, perpetuating a discourse that separates it from organised crime. The work in conjunction with an organisation of relatives of the disappeared is key in this representation.

Thinking about memory is also thinking about forgetting and silence. As Theidon and Lessa explain, memory and forgetting are in dialogue, as every memory is a decision for forgetting something else. With this memorial, the local authorities remember a particular event, not including the other thousands of cases of disappearances in the state (Theidon 2003; Lessa 2013). As Jelin explains, understating what is silenced in each memory helps in understanding the memories that are put forward (Jelin 2003b). In the discourse around the memorial in Allende, two main factors are silenced: first, the police and army's involvement in the events, and second, the way in which the local government hid the massacre and did not investigate the crimes for months. The plaque that accompanies the memorial illustrates this. The text on the plaque reads: 'IN MEMORY OF OUR LOVED ONES. The days might pass and distance might grow us apart, but we will be forever united 'by love and hope'. Together united for peace. 'WINGS OF HOPE' Allende, Coahuila de Zaragoza, October 2015' (*El Heraldo de Saltillo* 2017). This words support the narrative of love and peace advanced by the local government, while not mentioning the events in particular, the disappearances or their effects. Moreover, the plaque is signed by the organisation, but with the logos of municipal and state governments, to reaffirm the work in collaboration.





*Figure 31 Event during the Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances in 2017*

(El Heraldo de Saltillo 2017)

The memorial in Allende is not the only memorial to the disappeared in Coahuila. Grupo V.I.D.A. and FUUNDEC Región Laguna, have created their own memorials to the disappeared. Beyond Coahuila, another new memorial has been created in Jalisco and one more will be created by organisations of relatives of the disappeared in Veracruz (Alcalá 2017; 'Memorial Tiene Un Avance Del 90 %' 2017; 'Grupo Vida Apunta a Rancho Alegre' 2017; 'Vandalizan Memorial de Grupo Vida' 2017; Valles 2017; 'Memorial de Fuundec Torreón' 2017; Zavaleta 2018). But what is behind this increase in the creation of memorials? Achugar, Yerushalmi and Nora's ideas can help understand this. Achugar claims that there is an obsession with memory due to a panic to forget (Achugar 2002, 192). Yerushalmi argues that the antonym of memory is justice. In this sense, memory would be present because there is no justice (Yerushalmi 1989). For Nora, memory realms exist because there is not a will to remember.

As I have argued in this chapter, disappearances have fundamentally remained in impunity in the country, and there has not been a broad social will to remember, that is, an involvement of the broader population in the policies and politics of memory in this regard at least before the enforced disappearance of 43 Ayotzinapa students in 2014. In this context and to counter a dominant narrative that blames the disappeared and minimises the state's responsibilities towards disappearances, the organisations of relatives of the disappeared have added the creation of memorials and the observance of particular dates of remembrance to their work as vehicles of memory for the rehumanisation of their loved ones. At the same time, and as presented in the cases of the

International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances and of the memorial in Allende, different governments use memorialisation to advance their own versions of the events.



## CHAPTER 7 AYOTZINAPA AND ITS IMPACT ON THE PANORAMA OF DISAPPEARANCES IN MEXICO

On the night of 26 September 2014, 43 students from the 'Raúl Isidro Burgos' Rural Teaching College were disappeared, six more people were killed (among them, three Ayotzinapa students) and dozens more were wounded in Iguala, Guerrero. The 'Ayotzinapa case', as Mexican and international media called it, has attracted more attention than any other human rights violation in Mexico. Thousands of people took to the streets in Mexico and elsewhere to demand the return of the students and justice. The horror of what happened did not paralyse but instead helped to mobilise different sectors (Anguiano 2015). In November 2014, a poll revealed that 92% of the people reached knew about the disappearance of the students (Illades 2015, 113). Enforced disappearances, which are usually perceived in Mexico as a private matter affecting only the families of the disappeared, were for the first time seen by large sectors of the Mexican society as a social problem that affected them as well. Thousands of people were wearing masks with the faces of the students, learning their names, and missing them every day. The Mexican government was in the spotlight and the events of Iguala appeared to be a turning point in Mexican reality.

In previous chapters I have analysed the battles for memory around the disappeared in Mexico during two main periods. Even when the enforced disappearance of the 43 students is chronologically part of the second period, it can be argued that the event has been constructed as a separate case. As I have shown, in both periods it has been mainly the relatives of the disappeared (many times with the support of political and human rights organisations) who have served as what Jelin calls memory entrepreneurs (Jelin 2003b). In this chapter I argue that a difference between disappearances in the two periods and the 'Ayotzinapa case' has been the support of civil society. I analyse what implications this has for the issue of disappearances more generally.

Besides this, I show how many of the strategies used by the government in the two periods have been used in this case, too, but I explain how the 'Ayotzinapa case' managed to change the narrative that had until then been contested mainly by relatives and human rights organisations. Through this chapter I illustrate how this case has had a dual impact of making invisible disappearances more generally, while at the same time drawing attention to them and making them more visible. I argue that by focusing predominantly on the case, the movement for Ayotzinapa made other cases invisible by creating a literal memory which understood the case as unique and unparalleled, so it many times did not transcend the case itself (Todorov 2000). Nonetheless, the extent of the solidarity and momentum gained by Ayotzinapa did also put pressure on the government by showing a current human rights crisis, which was seized by other relatives and organisations to further the attention and action on their cases. The literal memory which usually does not lead beyond itself then became exemplary memory thanks to the work of human rights organisations and relatives of the disappeared (Todorov 1996). With their actions and benefitting from the publicity of the Ayotzinapa case, those memory entrepreneurs that had been working against disappearances before these events, connected the singularity of the case using it as an illustration of a bigger phenomenon.

The chapter is divided in four sections. In the first section I present an overview of the different versions of the events of the 26 and 27 September 2014 that will later serve to analyse the battles of memory around the construction of the past. In the second section I deal with the factors that have made the disappearance of the 43 students an emblematic case. The third section analyses the battles for memory in the Ayotzinapa case, as well as the relationship between these battles and the broader battles for memory around disappearances in Mexico. In the fourth section I examine the different actors of the movement for Ayotzinapa and their discourses towards disappearances more broadly, to later examine the effect that the mobilisation for Ayotzinapa has had on the general panorama on disappearances by making it more and less visible at the same time.

### 7.1 What happened in Iguala?

On the evening of the 26 September 2014, around 100 students from the 'Raúl Isidro Burgos' Rural Teaching College of Ayotzinapa, Guerrero, travelled to Iguala in the same state. In Iguala, the students were ambushed, persecuted and shot in several occasions. During the attacks, 43 students were disappeared, three more Ayotzinapa students and three passers-by were killed, and dozens of students and passers-by were wounded, some of them badly. The events that took place on that night and in the morning of the 27 September have been contested and different versions have been publicly debated. To understand the battles for memory around the case, I will present the version shared by state actors and what independent investigations have shed light on.

According to the government's version, which was presented by the Attorney General Jesús Murillo Karam in a press conference and transmitted live in public television on the 7 November 2014, the students had been wounded and killed by the municipal police under the orders of the mayor. The mayor had ordered the attack on the students as they were trying to sabotage the political event organised by his wife, who would run for mayor of the town. The 43 students had been illegally detained by local police and handed over to members of the Guerreros Unidos drug cartel. According to this version, members of this cartel had killed and burned the students in a dumpster in Cocula, after taking them for members of a rival drug cartel. The ashes of the students had been put in plastic bags and thrown in the river. At the press conference where this version was presented, the Attorney General in charge of the investigation said this was the 'historical truth'.<sup>97</sup>

Further investigations carried out by journalists and scholars, by the EAAF (Argentinian Team of Forensic Anthropology) and by the GIEI (Interdisciplinary Group of Independent Experts, sent by the IACHR) have challenged many aspects of the 'historical truth'.<sup>98</sup> According to what these

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<sup>97</sup> For the full press conference, see: Gobierno de la República 2014, 2014; 'Palabras Del Procurador Jesús Murillo Karam, Durante Conferencia Sobre Desaparecidos de Ayotzinapa' 2014.

<sup>98</sup> The arrangement for the GIEI to be formed and sent to Mexico was made following pressure of the relatives of the disappeared students and organisations working with them. According to its mandate, the GIEI would carry out the following activities: 'draw up plans for searching for the disappeared persons alive;

investigations have uncovered, and based on testimonies and forensic evidence, the students had travelled to Iguala to gather funds and to commandeer buses that they would use to transport students from different rural schools (Normales Rurales) from around the country who would join the demonstrations on the 2 October to mark the anniversary of the Tlatelolco massacre in Mexico City.<sup>99</sup> According to WOLA: 'Commandeering passenger buses is a traditional practice of students from the rural colleges (...) throughout Mexico; the practice is common, widely recognized, and largely tolerated. In previous incidents authorities in Guerrero had taken action to prevent students from taking buses, but the practice had never been met with lethal force or sustained pursuit' (H. Smith and Meyer 2016). Apart from the involvement of the municipal police, these investigations have revealed the implication of state, federal, and investigative police officers in attacking the students ('La Tragedia de Iguala: 2014-2015 — La Jornada' n.d.; Mónaco Felipe 2015; Gibler 2013; GIEI n.d.; Grupo Interdisciplinario de Expertos Independientes n.d.; A. Hernández 2016; H. Smith and Meyer 2016; Lewis and Gallagher 2015).

Although the army has counted with impunity and has not been deeply scrutinised, these investigations have shown that the 27 Battalion was at least aware of the unfolding events and did not intervene, and that it prevented the wounded students getting necessary medical treatment at a local clinic. According to these investigations, the motive for the attacks was likely to be that one of the buses commandeered by the students transported heroin worth millions of dollars, which was supposed to be smuggled to Chicago, and not the interruption of a political event (Grupo Interdisciplinario de Expertos Independientes n.d.; A. Hernández 2016; Gibler 2013; Camacho and Castillo 2017). The GIEI and EAAF's reports contradicted the official version from November 2014 according to which the students had been killed in a rubbish pit and showed the inconsistencies in the investigation as well as the tampering of evidence. For these researchers, the whereabouts of the students are still unknown (GIEI n.d.; Grupo Interdisciplinario de Expertos Independientes n.d.; J. A. Román 2015b; 'La Jornada: Ayotzinapa: El Descrédito de La Verdad Histórica' 2015; Ballinas 2015; EAAF 2016). According to Anabel Hernández, the official enquiry gives the impression of being more interested and focused in protecting the official version through destroying evidence and accusing innocent victims -who declared under torture- than in finding the whereabouts of the students and the people responsible for their disappearance (A. Hernández 2016). The GIEI and the UN Human Rights Office have highlighted the use of torture in the investigation of this case (OHCHR 2018; Grupo Interdisciplinario de Expertos Independientes n.d.). Even when the 'official truth' has been repeatedly proven wrong, the federal government has stood by it.

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technical analysis of the lines of investigation to determine criminal liabilities; and technical analysis of the Plan for Integral Attention to the Victims (Plan de Atención Integral a las Víctimas) of the events of September 26 and 27, 2014' (IACHR n.d.).

<sup>99</sup> For more on the Tlatelolco massacre and its commemorations, see Chapter 6.

## 7.2 The Emblematic Ayotzinapa Case

The violence against students on the 26 and 27 September and the way in which the government handled the case sparked a wave of national and international responses including protests, demonstrations, and foreign governments' condemnations (Appel 2014; 'Condena La ONU Desaparición de 43 Estudiantes de Ayotzinapa' 2014; Ximénez de Sandoval 2015; Comisión Interamericana de Derechos Humanos 2014). Disappearances have been a long standing issue in Mexico, but no case of disappearances or other human rights violations has had the impact that the disappearance of the 43 students had in terms of the mobilisation it created, the extent to which public opinion focused on it, and the national and international debate that it generated. The fact that 43 persons were disappeared together, with the clear involvement of the police should be enough to generate a social response. But other, similar events did not have the same effect. The Aguas Blancas massacre in 1995, the Acteal massacre in 1997, the massacre of San Fernando in 2010, the extrajudicial killing of 22 people in Tlatlaya in 2014 are just a few examples of other human rights violations that received some media attention and expressions of solidarity, but did not generate the level of social mobilisation and national and international attention that the disappearance of the 43 students did. Other cases include the police violence and killings in San Salvador Atenco, Estado de México (2006); and more recently Apatzingán, Michoacán (2015); Tanhuato, Michoacán (2015); and Nochixtlán, Oaxaca (2016) all of which are cases of human rights violations that have not sparked a similar response. Below, I analyse some of the reasons that placed Ayotzinapa in the centre of public debate.

One of the factors that affected the impact of Ayotzinapa's disappearances was the moment in which they occurred and the closeness with a prior case of extrajudicial killings. On 30 June 2014, 22 people were killed in San Pedro Limón, municipality of Tlatlaya, Estado de México. The state actors' version was that the victims were members of organised crime killed during a confrontation with the army. According to later investigations, the case, which was initially presented as a confrontation, was known to be a mass extrajudicial killing committed by the army (A. Hernández 2016, 73; Ferri Tórtola 2017; Human Rights Watch n.d., 2014b; J. M. Vivanco 2015; Comisión Nacional de los Derechos Humanos and México 2014). In the context of this case, the Miguel Agustín Pro Juárez Human Rights Centre released a report that included the orders followed by the army that led to the attack on civilians which read: 'to take down criminals (meaning to kill them) while it is dark' ('Sin Controles, Sin Castigo: Las Violaciones Del Estado Mexicano a Los Derechos Civiles y Políticos', n.d.; J. A. Román 2015a; Amnesty International 2017a; Tuckman 2015b). Organisations like HRW and AI actively denounced the case.<sup>100</sup>

The high profile reached by the Tlatlaya massacre fuelled the international condemnation of the attacks in Iguala. The two events are often linked when analysing impunity and human rights

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<sup>100</sup> AI's letter calling for the implementation of an impartial and exhaustive investigation, released on September 8<sup>th</sup> can be found here: Amnesty International 2017b.

violations in Mexico, as they not only show the human rights violations committed by the state, but also the strategies of blaming the victims and tampering with evidence (A. Hernández 2016; Associated Press 2016; Human Rights Watch 2014b). As stated in chapter 3, the way the Peña Nieto administration portrayed itself as different from the PAN governments was contradicted by the human rights violations that occurred in Iguala and Tlatlaya. The public scandal of the First Lady's possession of a millionaire 'White House' also represented a loss in terms of Peña Nieto's popularity (Holman 2014; Redacción AN 2017b; *BBC News* 2014).

Besides the moment in which the disappearance of the 43 Ayotzinapa students occurred, another factor that influenced the impact of the case was the nature and history of the Ayotzinapa school. The Normal Rural Raúl Isidro Burgos of Ayotzinapa, Guerrero is part of the larger project of normales rurales set up by Vasconcelos in the early 1920s. Tanalís Padilla explains:

Mexico's *normales rurales* (...) have long had a reputation for political radicalism. This reputation stems as much from extensive student protest within the *normales* as it does from the rural teachers who have figured prominently in militant agrarian mobilisations. The fact that famed guerrilla leaders such as Pablo Gómez, Arturo Gámiz and Lucio Cabañas either taught at or graduated from *normales rurales* has further contributed to their reputation of political radicalism (Padilla 2013, 20).

The schools were set up to bring education to poor young people who would later serve as community leaders (Hernández Navarro 2011; Illades 2015). Later governments saw the normales rurales and their project in a less favourable light as they were seen as creating communities of resistance across the country. As a consequence, they systematically reduced their funds and used the public force to repress their demonstrations. In the 1940s, students of Ayotzinapa were detained after protesting for better conditions for their school (Hernández Navarro 2012). During the 1960s and in the midst of political unrest, normales rurales were billed 'semilleros de guerrilleros' (guerrilla hotbeds) and more than half of the normales were closed. The normales rurales have been and are an example of political organisation and contestation (Padilla 2013). Among them, Ayotzinapa has always had a predominant role in resisting state violence and fighting for better conditions for the school, for the community and beyond (Hernández Navarro 2010, 2012). The most recent lethal attack, before the case of the 43, took place in December 2011, when two Ayotzinapa students were killed by police officers while blocking the highway to ask for better conditions for their school (Ocampo Arista n.d.; CNDH 2012b). Because of this history, when the students were attacked in September 2014 they already had ways to respond and organise (Schedler 2015; A. Hernández 2016).

The speed with which students activated a response to being ambushed, chased, and shot at in Iguala helped in rapidly and effectively disseminating the information of what had happened. After being shot at and chased by police officers, the students called their schoolmates, as well as the local media, and the Tlachinollan Mountain Human Rights Centre (Hernández Navarro 2015; 'Ayotzinapa Archivos| Centro de Derechos Humanos de La Montaña' n.d.; Mónaco Felipe 2015; Gibler 2013). The Tlachinollan human rights centre, along with the Miguel Agustín Pro Juárez Human Rights Centre

have supported the relatives of the disappeared since early on. The ways in which the students documented the events of the night of the 26 and dawn of the 27, along with local media, and with the support of human rights organisations has been fundamental to establish the events that took place in Iguala. The response not only by the Ayotzinapa students but also by the FECSM (Federación de Estudiantes Campesinos Socialistas de México, Federation of Peasant Socialist Students of Mexico) contributed to the case's public presence as students in other normales quickly mobilised. The marches to demand the return alive of the students were led by the parents and relatives, followed closely by FECSM with representatives from many schools across the country.<sup>101</sup>

Besides this, and contrary to what has happened in other cases of disappearance, the political formation and participation of some of the relatives of the 43 students also helped in mobilising from the start. Some of the relatives are members of the CETEG (Coordinadora Estatal de Trabajadores de la Educación en Guerrero, State Coordinator of Education Workers of Guerrero), and some of them had also been students of the Ayotzinapa school. Hernández Navarro refers to this as a transgenerational and intercommunal community that has defended normales rurales against their closure, and which has resisted the attacks and raised its voice for the return alive of the 43 students and for justice for all the victims (Hernández Navarro 2014). This has probably had an impact on the movement, as the process of politicisation and the search for allies occurred more naturally than in other cases. Being a big collective of people, the level of politicisation and political awareness among the parents of the 43 is uneven, but having people with radical political ideas in the collective has helped shape the movement.

For the reasons discussed above, mobilisations started very soon after the disappearance of the students. On the 28 September, Ayotzinapa students gave a press conference at the school. In the following days, students from other normales rurales arrived in Ayotzinapa (Ocampo Arista 2014). Only four days after the attacks, thousands of people marched in the streets of Chilpancingo, Guerrero, demanding a 'political trial' for the state's Governor and for Iguala's Mayor.<sup>102</sup> Members of the FECSM from four states, of the Frente Único de Normales Públicas del Estado de Guerrero (United Front of Public Teaching Colleges of Guerrero) and of the CETEG led the march, accompanying relatives of the students (Ocampo, Briseño, and Morelos 2014). The mobilisations and solidarity actions spread quickly.

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<sup>101</sup> A similar case took place in February 2017 when five members of the 'policía comunitaria' (communitarian police) from the municipality of Ostula, Michoacán were disappeared by members of the Navy and then handed over to drug dealers. This community has been affected by politically motivated state violence for many years and consequently organised against it so their response to the disappearances was quick and effective. The five members of the communitarian police were rescued a few days after their kidnapping ('Policías Comunitarios Fueron Secuestrados Por Marineros, Sostienen Indígenas de Ostula' 2017).

<sup>102</sup> 'Juicio político' (political trial) is a constitutional procedure carried out by both chambers 'to put into effect the principle of responsibility of public servants (...) who incur in responsibility during their mandate, independently of the penal trials that might follow' (Sistema de Información Legislativa n.d.).

The state's responsibility in the case, and the way in which the victims were portrayed contributed to the formation of a huge wave of support and solidarity with this case. As I have shown throughout this thesis, these are both topics in contestation around disappearances in particular and around human rights violations more generally. Even when different investigations gradually exposed the details of the implication of the state, the notion that police officers had killed and disappeared the students was publically known from the start. On the other hand, the fact that the victims were young students created a category of victims that resonated widely and that challenged the notion that disappeared people were nameless and faceless persons who were probably involved with organised crime.

The rehumanisation strategies that have been used by relatives of the victims and that I have presented in previous chapters were highly effective in this case and were carried out by a broader set of memory entrepreneurs. A few days after the attack the names and faces of the 43 students were made public. Journalist Paris Martínez interviewed the relatives and friends of the 43 students. The classmates of the 43 printed posters with the faces of the disappeared to cover Iguala with their presence just days after the attacks (P. Martínez 2014a, 2014b, 2014c). As Lindig and Villegas show, while the government insisted in portraying the students as dead and burned, their schoolmates and relatives showed their faces and names (Villegas and Lindig Cisneros 2015, 61). Even President Peña Nieto lamented the fact that 'young students have been affected and their rights violated' in his first official address on the case. During the demonstrations in Mexico City to coincide with the anniversary of the Tlatelolco Massacre, the normalista students carried the names and faces of their classmates. In London, a demonstration took place outside the Embassy on the same day and the names and faces of the disappeared were also displayed (Díaz 2014). The stories, names, and faces of the disappeared became ubiquitous in public places and social media. The category of the victims was constructed on their being young and students, but particularly on being poor students with the aspiration to a better life, something easy to relate to in a country with high inequality levels (Rocha and González). The discourse on Ayotzinapa emphasised how these young men were studying to be teachers to the poorest and most marginalised communities in the country. Cisneros Puebla et. al. show how people from different backgrounds feel connected to the case, as the identity of the victims is very clear (Enciso 2014; Rocha and González 2016; Cisneros Puebla, Alatorre, and Allen 2015; Morbiato 2017, 149).

Among the dead victims, the brutality with which Julio César Mondragón Fontes was killed, and the body exposed, also served as a catalyser for solidarity and action. Julio César Mondragón was found on the morning of the 27 with clear signs of torture and with the skin peeled off his face. Police officers showed the image of Julio César to students when they were giving depositions hours after the attacks. The picture was rapidly shared on social media in what can be considered a message of terror, although the author of the photograph remains unknown.<sup>103</sup> With the stories of the disappeared

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<sup>103</sup> While relatives of the other two killed students followed their process with the rest of the disappeared's relatives, Julio César's family had to undergo a different path for truth and justice. The body had to be exhumed and subjected to a second autopsy. The body spent months in a fridge before a DNA test was

and the killed students, the victims were no longer unknown and anonymous, but students with stories, families, and nicknames with whom others could easily relate. This created victims considered grievable by large groups, which thus created mobilisation around them (Butler 2012). The Movement for Peace with Justice and Dignity had succeeded in portraying the victims as such and not as collateral damage, as analysed in previous chapters. Nonetheless, they remained anonymous victims in their majority (Schedler 2015).

Many of the things that relatives of the disappeared have done for decades in terms of rehumanising their loved ones, such as highlighting the social and political life of the disappeared so they are known as a person missing to society, were quickly adopted by large sectors of Mexican society and of the international community regarding this case (Karl 2014a, 2014b). In a Zócalo full of people, writer Elena Poniatowska read the names and biographies of the 43 (*La Jornada* 2014b). Unlike the intangible and changing official number of 26,000 (now more than 37,000) persons missing, the number 43 became a political symbol synonymous of impunity, struggle, dignity, but mainly of a deep social wound. One of the fundamental contributions by GIEI was to encourage people to think about the victims not only in terms of the 43 disappeared students, but also the wounded, the people killed, and all of their families and people affected by these crimes (Grupo Interdisciplinario de Expertos Independientes 2015, n.d.; FUNDAR 2018). It also highlighted the importance of the attention to the victims along with the protocols of searching for the disappeared alive. Nonetheless, the discourse around Ayotzinapa focuses primarily on the disappeared students and not so much on the other victims.

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carried out, and the official investigation concluded that wild animals had eaten his face. EAAF concluded that he died because of multiple wounds, but because the second autopsy had been carried out months after the death and the body had not been properly preserved, it was hard to determine how his face skin had been taken off. Nonetheless, they reiterated their suspicion of the use of a cutting device (S. H. Román 2015; *El rostro de Julio* 12/072016; CNDH 2016; Díaz 2016).





*Figure 32 Parents of the 43 disappeared students lead the march on the first anniversary of the 26 September (Tovar 2015).*

The disappearance of the students served as a symbol of people's frustration towards a status quo of corruption and impunity, and made hundreds of thousands of people mobilise around the case (Eraña and Rojas 2015). Large demonstrations were held across the country and worldwide. Hundreds of thousands of people took to the streets to demand the return alive of the students. Unions, schools, universities, all marched together following the parents' cry for the return alive of the students. The slogan 'Fuera Peña' (Peña Out) summed up people's frustration with the status quo. Different solidarity networks were established or re-activated worldwide. Examples of the former are the Zapatista support network and the international chapters of #YoSoy132. Collectives and groups in solidarity with Ayotzinapa were created across the world, like the Collectif Paris-Ayotzinapa, Comité Québec con Ayotzinapa, Manchester for Ayotzinapa, and Australia in Action for Ayotzinapa. Alongside the mobilisation in the streets, Ayotzinapa inspired an unusual amount of cultural responses to represent the absence of the 43 disappeared students and the necessity of their return. Music albums, poetry books, videos, songs, street performances, documentaries, drawings among others were created around the case. Concerts, museum exhibitions, and theatre plays were used to talk about the disappearance of the 43 both in Mexico and elsewhere (Gompf 2014).



*Figure 33 The crowd observes a big Peña Nieto-shaped piñata being burnt after the Acción Global por Ayotzinapa in Mexico City's Zócalo (November 20 2014).*

Besides this, social media worked as a catalyst for making Ayotzinapa an important topic both inside and outside the country. Maybe the fact that students and a large portion of urban youth saw Ayotzinapa as a problem close to their hearts explains why the dissemination of information through those channels became so prominent. As will be examined below, the battle for truth was not only carried out in the streets, but also on social media. Hashtags related to Ayotzinapa became trending topics and stories related to the victims dominated the social media, which served not only as a medium to share information, but also as a tool for organising and to take to the streets (Rocha and González 2016). Certainly, social media has its limitations when referring to Guerrero, a state where 25% of the population lives in extreme poverty and 62% live in poverty (Rocha and González 2016), and where only one third of the population has access to internet, so it was probably not the main organisation and communication tool for the families (M. A. Rodríguez 2015). Nonetheless, it served to organise communities in urban areas and to connect groups and share information in different cities and countries.



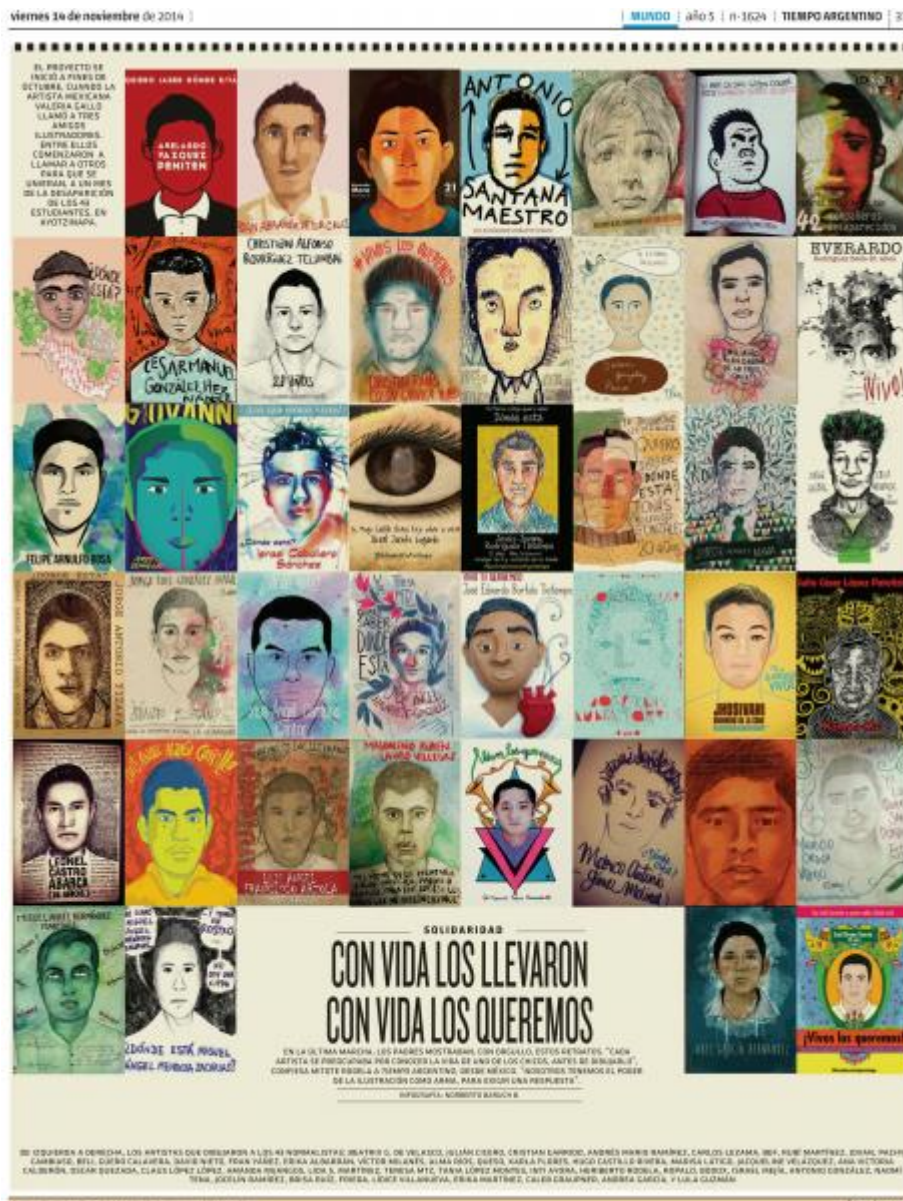


Figure 34 Poster made with some of the drawings of the Ilustradores con Ayotzinapa (L. Vidal 2014).

### 7.3 Battles for Memory over Ayotzinapa

As I have explained above, the disappearance of the 43 Ayotzinapa students created a wave of support and solidarity that has impacted on the ferocity of the battles for memory around this case. As shown in previous chapters, the battles for memory are intense as they are battles over how the past is remembered, which impacts the present and the future (Oglesby 2007; Huysen 2003). In this section I analyse these battles, focusing on the struggles over who committed the crimes (specially the role of the state), over what happened to the students (particularly if they were murdered), and over who the victims are (that is, the battles for the culpability or innocence of the victims). As I argue in this chapter this case helped make visible the strategies that the Mexican government uses to

perpetrate impunity through its different agencies. For example, some of the people in charge of the attacks and of the faulty investigation were not only not convicted after being pointed out for committing and covering crimes, but some of them have been rewarded with better positions within the state apparatus (A. Hernández 2016; F. Martínez 2016; Redacción Sin Embargo 2016). As I show, these battles resonate with the battles for memory around the disappeared presented throughout this thesis. As with those battles, what is in dispute is the general representation of the state and its responsibilities, as well as the representation of the victims.

One of the main topics in contestation in this case has been who is responsible for wounding, killing, torturing, and disappearing the students. Beyond this, this has also represented a dispute over the quality of the state structure and over the federal government's and the state's responsibilities on human rights violations committed by state actors. The hashtag 'FueElEstado' (It Was the State) serves as a point of departure to analyse this battle and the ideas that underpin it. The hashtag became rapidly viral and was painted as a big sign in the Zócalo on October 2014 (Ordorika and Gilly n.d.; Gil Olmos 2016; Casar 2014; M. Vivanco 2017). Against the government's version that the disappearance of the students was carried out by organised crime with the help of a few police officers, this phrase signals the involvement of state actors in the disappearance. According to international legislation, if state actors of any level commit enforced disappearances then the state is responsible and has to answer in terms of investigation, reparation and guarantees of non-repetition, which was the argument put forward by specialists and human rights advocates. In the battles over the narratives of the events, Santiago Corcuera, Mexican lawyer and a member of the UN Committee on Enforced Disappearances, argued that enforced disappearances are indeed a state crime as their definition is that they are committed by members of the state (regardless of their level), or by private individuals with the authorisation, support or acquiescence of the state (Corcuera 2014). Nonetheless, this specialised knowledge was probably not what motivated the hashtag. The FueElEstado hashtag seems to equal the state to the government, and in debating if the State had committed the disappearances what seems to be in debate is the extent of the involvement of the different levels of the government in the crime. Moreover, the way in which state actors had covered the crimes and the creation of a 'historical truth' were also in debate. As with other battles for memory around the disappeared, ultimately what it is at stake is the reputation of the different governments and Mexico's internal and external image. The position of the federal government in minimising the events as a local problem and then in carrying out actions to show the progress on the case are in line with what different governments have done in terms of portraying Mexico as a democratic country respectful of human rights.

The federal government has focused on a damage control strategy advancing the idea that the crimes were committed by municipal police without the knowledge or the involvement of other levels of security forces, as if this then took the responsibility away from the government in terms of commission but also of dealing with the issue. From his first declaration on the case, President Peña Nieto emphasized that this was a local problem that was going to be solved locally and that the

Guerrero state government should assume its responsibility in the case (Enciso 2014; Castillo 2014). As stated above, there is now enough evidence to prove that all levels of the security apparatus were involved in the attacks, from the municipal police to the army, going through the state, investigative, and federal police, and that state actors at the federal level tampered with evidence and tortured people to further the 'official truth'.

During the press conference on 7 November 2014 when the 'historical truth' was presented, the Attorney General said: 'A state crime is something much bigger. Iguala is not the Mexican state'. With this, the federal government tried to establish the crime as localised, unique and disconnected from the rest of human rights violations committed by state actors across the country and from the widespread collusion between the state actors and organised crime. Influential voices supported that version. An example of this was UNAM's Provost who declared that this was not a state issue, that Iguala is in Guerrero and that this was then a problem of that state (implying that the federal government should not be blamed for this case) (Corcuera 2014). What seemed to be at stake then was the implication of high levels of the federal government.



*Figure 35 Huge 'It was the State' sign in the Zócalo (22 October 2014) (Rexiste 2014).*

The 'Fue el Estado' slogan also represents one of the most important questions, which transcends Ayotzinapa and has to do with the implication of the army in this case and in human rights violations in the country, and with the army's impunity after committing human rights violations. The parents, together with their legal representation and social organisations, have highlighted the implication of the different levels of the armed forces, but particularly the role of the army in the disappearance of the 43 (A. Hernández 2016, 337).<sup>104</sup> Different international agencies, especially GIEI have tried to investigate the role the army might have had in the events of the 26 and 27 September, but access to army documents and to interviewing key army actors has been blocked. GIEI insisted on having access to the military to carry out their investigation, which was systematically denied to them. The Secretary of Defense, General Salvador Cienfuegos said his soldiers were not going to be treated like

<sup>104</sup> On this topic, see: Human Rights Watch 2009.

criminals. In previous declarations he had said that the army had not acted on the night of the attack and that it was better because if they had acted things would have gotten even worse. The involvement of the army in the attacks has been analysed in many outlets, of which the documentary 'Mirar Morir: El Ejército en la noche de Iguala' (Watching Them Die: The Army in the Night of Iguala) and the book 'Ayotzinapa, Mentira histórica' (Ayotzinapa: Historical Lie) are the most extensive ones ('Soldiers "Won't Be Treated Like Criminals' in Ayotzinapa Case, Mexico Army Chief Says' n.d.; Fernández 2015; Témoris, n.d.). The parents and relatives of the disappeared students have held demonstrations outside the headquarters of the 27 Battalion in Guerrero, which have many times resulted in the army's use of force against them (Flores Contreras 2015; A. Guerrero n.d.; Rosagel n.d.; 'Parents of Disappeared Mexican Students Want Army Investigated' n.d.). What is under discussion is not only if the army actively participated in the events, but also if the students were held in army premises after having been illegally detained or even if there is a possibility that if they were killed, that they were cremated at the army's barracks (S. Martínez 2015b; Padgett n.d.; S. Martínez 2015a; Fazio 2015).

The battle over the state's culpability or innocence in terms of the crimes has also affected the way in which the disappearance of the students has been treated legally. Even when it was clear from the beginning that this is a case of enforced disappearances, those prosecuted are accused of different crimes (e.g. illegal deprivation of liberty or murder). As has been presented in previous chapters, this is a crucial difference. The prosecution of the crimes as enforced disappearances would mean the acknowledgement of the implication of state actors and thus the responsibility of the state according to international legislation. Even when evidence and different reports have highlighted the impossibility of the version defended by the federal government, its position has not changed. If the government accepted the inconsistencies of the investigation, it would have to accept its own implication in the attacks and in the manipulation of the investigation. The way in which disappearances are treated in this case is an example of a broader tendency of treating disappearances as other crimes to reduce the political cost of these crimes, analysed in chapter 5.

The way in which the federal government tried to close the case on 7 November 2014 was received with public outrage and a social mobilisation that were organised around the hashtag 'Ya me cansé'. After the Attorney General Murillo Karam presented what he called the 'historical truth', and acted visibly annoyed with journalists who asked questions about this, he finished by saying 'I am tired' or 'I have had enough' (Ya me cansé). This became an immediate trending topic on Twitter and thousands of people took to the streets to protest against this and to demand the return alive of the students (despite the 'historical truth's' version that they had been killed). The modified sentence 'Ya me cansé del miedo' (I am tired of fear) was written with enormous letters outside the Attorney General's office.

The 'historical truth' intended to close the case and instead became a spark for more protests and social unrest (Associated Press 2014; 'Artistas Mexicanos Exigen Justicia Por Ayotzinapa y Dicen #YaMeCansé' 2014; '#YaMeCansé, El 'Hashtag' Que Aglutinó El Descontento Social Por Ayotzinapa'

n.d.; 'Twitter Muestra Evolución de #YaMeCansé' n.d.; Mundo n.d.). The Attorney General commented a few days later: 'When I said 'I am tired' it was because I am tired of that: I am tired of a brutal violence. I have lived that, I have it every single day. It does get to me. Besides, I had not slept in 40 hours' (Redacción Animal Político 2014). This did not help his case and the hashtag remained a trending topic across the world ('Twitter Muestra Evolución de #YaMeCansé' n.d.). The webpage 'yamecansé.mx' was created to gather expressions of indignation about the case. The phrase reflected the solidarity actions of people who do not usually talk about politics in public ('Al Igual Que Todos Ellos, Yo También #YaMeCansépic.Twitter.Com/Lv50haL5Wm' 2014). Ayotzinapa had been able to group many different views in the demand for the return alive of the students and for an end to impunity. The fundamental difference in terms of the social will to remember between this case and previous cases of disappearances crystallised in the mobilisation towards the case.

Rocha and González argue that the hashtag #TodosSomosAyotzinapa also represented a common place of youth and defencelessness against a common enemy: the state. Hashtags, as discourse in general, cannot be analysed in isolation as they interact between each other, but #FueElEstado represents a more political and direct accusation towards the state and its responsibility. It is interesting to see how hashtags or slogans can also be appropriated by the part that is being accused. President Peña Nieto declared 'todos somos Ayotzinapa' trying to use the slogan as a way of saying Ayotzinapa had happened to society in general and denying the state's responsibility in the case. As can be expected, this alone created a wave of indignation (Rocha and González 2016; Vargas and Martínez 2014; López y Rivas 2014). Those battles for memory described by Jelin also took place in cyberspace where a state discourse was being contested (Jelin 2003b).

The use of social media has been fundamental to the battles over Ayotzinapa. The experience of the #YoSoy132 movement in 2012 was re-activated with this event and so were the responses given by the government, particularly the use of the so-called *Peñabots*. During the presidential campaign in 2012, part of the battle was carried out on social media creating an online supranational public opinion (Rocha and González 2016; Favela 2016). Thousands of fake or automatised accounts were used as a counterpart of the attacks towards the PRI candidate, Enrique Peña Nieto. Their use afterwards has been nonstop, but was particularly important during the first few months after the disappearance of the 43 Ayotzinapa students. If Twitter deleted a hashtag, users supporting Ayotzinapa would create a new hashtag by simply adding a number to it. According to recent analysis this strategy costs around 80 million pesos per month as thousands of people are paid to manage these accounts. These bots 'have followed protesters from hashtag to hashtag (...), drowning out real conversations with noise. They've also seen similar bots create fake hashtags in apparent attempts to push real hashtags out of Twitter's trending list, spread anti-protest messages, and even send death threats to specific activists (Finley) (Villanueva 2016a, 2016b, 2016c; Finley 2015; D. Peña 2015). Social media served as a channel for articulation and organisation of protests and actions on the street, but it also became a battleground to build a discourse on the case. As shown before, hashtags pointing out the

responsibility of the state and its general attitude towards the case became worldwide trending topics, which generated a strong reaction from the state apparatus.

For Anguiano, there are two different logics regarding the disappearance of the 43 students: one is carried out by the relatives and people in solidarity mobilising to get truth and justice, demanding the return alive of the students (Anguiano 2015). The other one, coming from the government is a damage control strategy. It is only when the social demand is too loud that the state responds, but it does it by postponing conflict, by making the families believe that it is doing something, that their case is being dealt with, so protest does not make sense anymore (Eraña and Rojas 2015; OEA 2009; A. Hernández 2016; Mónaco Felipe 2015; Gibler 2013). This resonates with the battles for memory presented in previous chapters in which the different governments have responded -and usually only superficially- to the cases of disappearances as a reaction to national and international pressure.

One of the first moments of contestation in terms of the official version of what happened in Iguala was when state actors announced they had found 13 out of the 57 disappeared students a few days after the disappearances had taken place. The lawyers representing the students clarified that 12 of those students had never been disappeared, but had been mistakenly included in the first list, and that the 13<sup>th</sup> student had been found dead. By declaring this, the government was advancing an image of progress on the case when they were not making any progress. In a similar way, President Peña Nieto's appearance on national TV with a message on the important agreements reached with the relatives of the disappeared students at their meeting in late October 2014 was a way to portray an image of closeness with the relatives. The relatives immediately rejected this in their own press conference where they were critical of the federal administration (Redacción AN 2014b; LA GAZETA TV 2014).

Another example of the government responding in a high-profile way that did not really impact on the case was Peña Nieto's announcement of a Decalogue, a ten-point plan with actions to improve security, justice and the rule of law, one day after the two months anniversary of the attacks to the students. Even years after this, the majority of the points have not been implemented (Staff 2014; Briseño, Héctor and Ocampo 2014).

Besides the battle over who committed the crimes and over the responsibility of the state, another important struggle, which resonates with the work that relatives of the disappeared have carried out for decades in Mexico, has been the insistence on the return alive of the students. The slogan 'Vivos los llevaron, vivos los queremos' became the most important slogan for the solidarity movement around Ayotzinapa. According to Eraña and Rojas, '(t)his claim articulates a non-negotiable demand: that they return just as they left. (...) It is a claim for all those who are missing from us to return, for their faces and names, so there is no one missing anymore, never' (Eraña and Rojas 2015, 33). In general terms, the highly flawed strategy to search for the disappeared in Mexico has been to



prioritise the search for human remains over the search for people alive. In previous chapters I have shown how it has mainly been the relatives of the disappeared and human rights organisations who have demanded their return alive. The difference between Ayotzinapa and other cases of disappearances was that the claims for the return alive of the students were made by the relatives but supported by large sectors of civil society.

From the first explanation of the events in October 2014, the government argued that the students had been killed and buried in a mass grave (Briseño 2014; Redacción AN 2014a). To this, the relatives responded asking for the intervention of EAAF to run independent DNA tests for the identification of the bodies. The press conference to announce that more bodies had been found was held just the day after the first mass action in solidarity with Ayotzinapa (G. Castillo 2014b). After EAAF became involved in the process the PGR acknowledged that the bodies did not match the students' DNA. The negative match between the students and the bodies found in mass graves uncovered both the issue on mass graves in the area and across the country and the PGR's negligence in terms of identification, which has continued ever since (*BBC News* 2015; *BBC News* 2016; 'Sin Identificar, Más Del 80% de Cuerpos Encontrados En Fosas' 2016; J. A. Román 2017). According to the Ministry of Interior there are more than 35,000 unidentified bodies in the country (Reforma/Staff 2018). The relief that the relatives of the 43 disappeared students and the general public appeared to have felt knowing that the bodies in the mass graves were not those of the students, was followed by questions of who those persons were and how they had gotten there.

Then the 'historical truth' was presented as a second version of what had occurred. As mentioned above, according to this version the 43 students had been killed and burned in a rubbish dump. While civil society focused on keeping the demand of return alive of the students, a debate on the possibility or impossibility of the fire in the Cocula dumpster became public. Scientists from the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), EAAF, and experts consulted by GIEI denied the existence of a fire like the one mentioned by PGR. To each one of these groups, the PGR responded saying the fire had indeed occurred. GIEI's report presented a list of inconsistencies in the investigation carried out by the PGR, but instead of debating some other substantial claims, the PGR and government's debate centred on the fire (Goldman 2015). Of the remains found in dubious conditions, of which there are allegations that evidence was mishandled, one resulted positive in terms of identification. Two small bones helped identify Alexander Mora Venancio. Again, the results of this identification were given to the families and general public just before one of the Acciones Globales por Ayotzinapa (Global Actions for Ayotzinapa), which were coordinated days of actions observed around the world to demand the return alive of the students. The EAAF and GIEI have pointed out the inconsistencies in how those remains were found (La Jornada: 2014; Grupo Interdisciplinario de Expertos Independientes n.d.). During the march, the parents announced the findings and reiterated their commitment to keep on demanding truth and justice and the return alive of the students. The PGR presented the case of another student as a positive identification a few days before the first anniversary of the attacks, to which EAAF publicly responded with a clarification

establishing that it was not a positive identification and that it should not be treated as such (EAAF 2017). EAAF has collaborated in Mexico for decades, working on cases of femicide, on the disappeared from the 1970s, and on the disappearances of migrants to name a few. EAAF usually maintains a low profile in the territories where they work. In the Ayotzinapa case, nonetheless, the team has had a higher profile, giving press conferences and having public appearances. The team even stated that it has never seen a level of mistakes as the ones seen in Mexico (EAAF 2017; Ludueña 2016).

At the end of the press conference presenting the 'historical truth' the head of the PGR said that the students continued in the category of disappeared persons. However, that office and the federal government in general have tried to convince the public that the students are dead. Regardless of the identification of one of the students and the government's insistence on the death of the other 42, the rhetoric of the movement in solidarity insists on speaking of 43 *disappeared* students. 'Vivos los queremos' remains the main demand, and the parents travel across the country and to different countries sharing their struggle, raising awareness on the case and creating new alliances. One of the main strategies used by the movement of the parents of the 43 Ayotzinapa students were the 'caravanas', which visited North and South America, Europe, as well as many cities and towns in Mexico ('Mapa EuroCaravana 43 Ayotzinapa' n.d.; Díaz 2014; Redacción El Universal 2015; Chorny 2015; Arghiris n.d.; "Euro-Caravan 43" for the Ayotzinapa Students' n.d.).

Besides the use of bots in social media, the federal and local governments have responded with the use of state violence against demonstrations on the streets. The most visible violence against protestors in Mexico City occurred after the demonstration on 20 November 2014. Furthermore, demonstrations in different cities have been met with violence, and normalistas and relatives of the disappeared have been attacked by police officers on several occasions (Gil Olmos and Tourliere 2014; Redacción AN 2014c). Along with this and the strategy of blaming the events on organised crime and trying to convince the public of the death of the students, blaming the victims has been an essential mechanism in the battle to position a discourse on what happened on this case. Similar to 'algo habrán hecho' (they must have done something to deserve it) or 'por algo será' (this happened for a reason) used in many other cases analysed in previous chapters, from the dictatorships in Latin America to the disappeared of the so-called 'War on Drugs', the students' combative past was depicted as one of the reasons why they had been disappeared.

In a similar way, and as part of the 'historical truth', the Attorney General highlighted the alleged infiltration of a local organised crime gang among the students. This version was advanced by the Attorney General and echoed in media across the country, particularly media historically close to the government. Articles reporting the version of the "Los Rojos" infiltration to Ayotzinapa as the motive for the attack against the students can be found in several newspapers (Excélsior 2015; 2015 n.d.; Mosso n.d.; Barajas 2014; Castilla and Urrutia 2015; Del Pozo, Musielik, and Casti n.d.). The use of nicknames, a tradition at the Normal Rural, was repeatedly pointed to together with nicknames used

by the alleged drug dealers as if that meant they were the same (Illades 2015). Two months after the press conference when the 'historical truth' was presented, Murillo Karam said that the Ayotzinapa students were not 'sisters of charity' thus implying they were to blame for their disappearance ('Desaparecidos #Ayotzinapa 'No Eran Hermanas de La Caridad': Procurador' 2015). This discourse of suggesting that the victims were part of the organised crime has been, as I have shown, widely extended during the second period of disappearances. In their final report, GIEI insisted that there was no proof to sustain the idea that the students were involved with organised crime (Grupo Interdisciplinario de Expertos Independientes n.d.).

Moreover, the strategies to discredit the Ayotzinapa students were not only limited to the students and the school, but extended to the relatives of the disappeared and the human rights organisations working with them. This strategy even impacted the group of interdisciplinary experts sent by the IACHR and the EAAF, whose work has been constantly questioned and who have been harassed by the government and by media allied to it. The members of GIEI and the IACHR's Executive Secretary, as EAAF in this and other moments in the work they have carried out in Mexico, suffered a smear campaign from the Mexican government, which was condemned by the IACHR. Besides this, the Mexican government used specialised software to spy on GIEI members, journalists and human rights defenders working on the case (Amnesty International 2016a; OAS 2016b; Ahmed 2017).

As with disappearances more generally, the battles for memory over Ayotzinapa can also be analysed through the battles for the dates of memorialisation (Jelin 2003b, 2007). The dates referred to in chapter 6 are mostly observed by relatives of the disappeared and human rights organisations. Nonetheless, this is different in the case of Ayotzinapa in which the dates of commemoration have indeed become a field of contestation between some parts of the civil society along with the parents and classmates of the 43 students on the one hand, and state actors on the other hand. The Acciones Globales por Ayotzinapa started on 8 October with a 'mega marcha' in Mexico City and actions in solidarity across the globe. For many months, the Acciones Globales staged some of the biggest demonstrations in Mexico City and elsewhere, with simultaneous demonstrations in dozens of cities elsewhere. First, the demonstrations were carried out almost every week, and then became a monthly action held at least in Mexico City. Some of the official responses or the public appearances made by government officials coincided in time with these actions. For example, General Attorney Murillo Karam, who was in charge of the investigation that led to the 'historical truth' was removed the day after a big demonstration in Mexico City marking the five months anniversary of the attacks, and two days before the arrival to the country of GIEI (Reséndiz, García, and Oter 2015).

A clear example of these battles regarding dates is the way in which the Senate declared 26 September the National Day against Enforced Disappearance (Redacción AN 2015b). This was done just a few days before the first anniversary of the attacks, without consulting the movement in solidarity with Ayotzinapa. The majority of the political parties presented this initiative as a step forward in the fight against disappearances, while representatives of PRD and MORENA expressed

their concern that this decree disregarded the struggle of relatives of the disappeared who had been fighting for decades. Víctor Manuel Silva Tejeda (PRI) expressed that this decree showed the commitment with human rights and with the fact that laws should serve to guarantee those rights (Redacción AN 2015b). The only practical implication of declaring this day the National Day against Disappearances is that on that day flags should be raised at half-mast, which is usually done as a sign of mourning. Unlike the Day of Memory for Truth and Justice in Argentina that became a national holiday around which teachers are encouraged to create debates in their classrooms to think about what happened on that day (devteam n.d.), in Mexico it is one more governmental action that seems to deal with the problem without reflecting on it. As will be shown below, many of the measures taken towards the Ayotzinapa case have further divided the movement in solidarity with Ayotzinapa from other collectives and organisations working against disappearances in Mexico both before and after the attacks to the Ayotzinapa students.

The battles for memory on the Ayotzinapa case have been more fierce and public due to the wide involvement of national and international civil society, and because of the pressure exerted by national and international organisations. Nonetheless, the things that are in debate resonate with the cases presented in previous chapters: the demand of return alive and of search alive of the disappeared, the implication of the state, and the denunciation of corruption and impunity. Moreover, this case shows how state actors have used memorialisation to further an official discourse of dealing with human rights violations while the basic demands of the relatives are not met. On the other hand, the actions of the solidarity movement have tried to rehumanise and to give back the category of living and grievable to the disappeared, making visible the stories and faces behind the numbers (Karl 2014a, 2014b; Butler 2012).<sup>105</sup>

#### **7.4 Ayotzinapa and its (Dis)connection with the Broader Context of Disappearances**

Although Ayotzinapa generated a huge wave of mobilisation and solidarity, part of the discourse of the solidarity movement appeared disconnected from the broader human rights crisis, and from the crisis in terms of enforced disappearances beyond that case. Nonetheless, as I argue below, while the majority of the solidarity movement has treated this case as literal memory, which is presented as unique and beyond comparison, taking then visibility off some other cases, the Ayotzinapa case has also served as exemplary memory, having an effect of making more visible the human rights crisis and of putting pressure to the government (Todorov 2000). Human rights and relatives' organisations have used this political moment to gain more attention to disappearances beyond the case.

In general terms, four groups can be identified: the relatives of the disappeared, the two main human rights organisations working with the relatives of the disappeared (Tlachinollan and Centro Pro), the

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<sup>105</sup> See more on grievability in Chapter 5.

students of the Ayotzinapa school, and the broader public in solidarity with the movement.<sup>106</sup> Each one of these four groups have their particularities in terms of the discourse around Ayotzinapa and the way in which they have engaged with the broader issue of disappearances in Mexico. The relatives of the 43 disappeared students did not include the broader crisis of disappearances in their early discourse and have gradually related to other struggles beyond their own demands.<sup>107</sup> Probably because of their political education, the position of the Ayotzinapa students tends to be more aware of the national human rights crisis, and particularly of the history of disappearances in Mexico, and of the extent of the problem. Similarly, the human rights organisations' discourse includes more of a general context and tries to link the case of the 43 disappeared students with the broad context of disappearances.

In terms of the social movement in solidarity with Ayotzinapa, the general discourse has focused on the case itself without making the connection between the disappearance of the 43 students and the context of generalised and systematic disappearances. The Ayotzinapa case achieved what relatives of the disappeared have been struggling for over decades, in terms of a broad social will to remember crystallised in the wider society recognising the absence of their loved ones not as a private matter but as a public problem, affecting all members of society. One of the few cultural manifestations in which the disappearance of the 43 is linked to the overall crisis of enforced disappearances is the Anti-Monumento +43. This (anti) monument installed in Paseo de la Reforma in April 2015 is made of two big metal numbers (43) and a plus sign representing all the other disappearances beyond Ayotzinapa. Even if the monument wanted to include disappearances more generally, it has not been assimilated by other relatives of the disappeared as a symbolic place for them to remember their loved ones (Olivares Alonso 2016; medioslibres 2015). The prominence of the 43 in this memorial probably explains why relatives of other disappeared people do not feel it as a place of comfort.

The mother of a disappeared young man from Monterrey told me that they were not treated by the general public in the same way as the mothers of the 43 Ayotzinapa students, which for her showed a lack of understanding on the fact that they are struggling against the same crime (Huerta Tarrega 2015). Even when the majority of the movement did not make this link, there were attempts to connect Ayotzinapa with a wider human rights issue. An example of this are the posters below. The image on the left, created by a cultural centre in Mexico City, reads: 'We do have memory in my home. We are missing 43 and thousands more', and calls to the attention of a lack of historical memory in the 'we are missing 43' demand. The image on the right, winner of a competition organised by the Autonomous Metropolitan University (UAM), reads: 'It is not only Ayotzinapa, it is all of Mexico', with

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<sup>106</sup> The group of relatives of the disappeared is not homogeneous, but the external image is one of a coherent movement with similar positions. Likewise, the solidarity movement includes a varied group of people and collectives but with similar demands.

<sup>107</sup> Other relatives of the disappeared that have been working for long in Mexico organised around Ayotzinapa to show their solidarity. An example of this is FUNDENL, which almost immediately organised demonstrations in Monterrey to demand the return alive of the students. Students of the Ayotzinapa school visited Monterrey and participated in an event organised by FUNDENL at the Square of the Disappeared (Hidalgo Rea 2015; PublicacionAbierta 2015).

the names of past massacres, and words like violence, death, poverty, killing, mass graves, etc. ('En Mi Casa Sí Tenemos Memoria, Nos Faltan 43 y Miles Más.' 2017; Chávez Gutiérrez 2014).



Figure 36 Posters connecting Ayotzinapa with a broader human rights crisis.

In terms of memory and connection with past struggles, even when the solidarity movement for Ayotzinapa has used some of the iconography and slogans of organisations that have fought for decades against disappearances, there does not seem to be recognition of this history. The 'vivos los llevaron, vivos los queremos' slogan that has been used since the early 1980s by the Eureka Committee and by other collectives, and more recently by the relatives of the disappeared across the country, was widely used in demonstrations and cultural manifestations in solidarity with Ayotzinapa. Nonetheless, there was no connection to those other relatives of the disappeared searching for their loved ones or to their struggles.

I have argued in previous chapters that there is a disconnection between the struggles of the relatives of the disappeared from the 1960s and those of the mid-2000s onwards, and this happened again between the relatives of the second period and the relatives of the disappeared Ayotzinapa students. The posters below are an example of how many times what has been used in previous decades to demand the return of the disappeared was used by the movement in solidarity with Ayotzinapa without acknowledging its history. The poster in the left was made in the 1980s to support Eureka's struggle. In the poster on the right, the name of the Committee has been erased, and a legend for the



43 disappeared students has been included. This symbolic act of erasure deleted at once the name of the committee and the history of the disappeared previous to the Ayotzinapa students.



Figure 37 'Mothers do not cry, now they fight' posters (Cholakian n.d.).

The association made between the disappearances of Ayotzinapa students and the Tlatelolco massacre is another way in which the treatment of the former has made other cases less prominent.<sup>108</sup> The manner in which the victims and the perpetrators were defined contributed to make an association between the cases. In both cases, the victims were students either killed or disappeared by members of the security agencies. In the Tlatelolco massacre the victims are mostly anonymous and even the number of victims is unknown to this day, while in the Ayotzinapa case the personal details of the disappeared, killed, and wounded students circulated from early on. Ayotzinapa has been treated as a case that represents a wider reality, but as I argue here, in many aspects it has been made so exceptional that it pushes other cases into the shadows. Something similar to this happens with the Tlatelolco massacre and how it has been represented. In terms of memory, as described in previous chapters, the Tlatelolco massacre holds a privileged space and is often represented as *the* attack against students and *the* case of state violence in the 1960s, instead of *one* case that could help understand and analyse other cases. The problem with linking Ayotzinapa

<sup>108</sup> See Sergio Aguayo's book on the relationship between Ayotzinapa and the Tlatelolco massacre (Aguayo 2015).

directly with the 2 October massacre is that this connection hides all the cases that occurred in between these two. In some of the analyses that link the two cases, it might look as if there was nothing (or nothing relevant) between 1968 and 2014 in terms of state violence. Instead of presenting both cases as exemplary memory, understanding their characteristics but thinking on how comparing them to other cases could lead to actions, these two events are many times presented as literal memory, unique and beyond comparison, and then preventing actions beyond them (Todorov 1996).

The treatment given by state actors to the Ayotzinapa case made other cases even more invisible, and at the same time revictimised both the relatives of the 43 Ayotzinapa students, and other relatives of the disappeared. This was made mainly by prioritising (or claiming to prioritise) Ayotzinapa over other cases, and by publicly sharing all the details of alleged progress of the investigation at the government's convenience. When interviewing relatives of the disappeared for this thesis, some mentioned how different the reaction from the government had been in this case compared to their cases. They pointed out that often their own cases were left behind or dealt with more slowly than before because, according to different government bodies, all the resources were being used for the Ayotzinapa case. One of the interviewees said: 'the federal government looked at this issue, and in less than a month they had results. Ayotzinapa achieved in one month what we have been asking for years' (Flores Santoyo 2015). However, the government focused its resources on creating superficial responses rather than on solving the Ayotzinapa case. Relatives of Ayotzinapa do not get efficient access to CEAV's (Executive Commission for the Attention of Victims) resources, and as has been shown before, the investigation on the whereabouts of the students and on the culprits of the crimes has not been successful.<sup>109</sup> In this sense, the government's claim that they were unable to deal with other cases because of focusing on Ayotzinapa had no basis. In presenting Ayotzinapa as more important, the government revictimised the other relatives.

Besides this, by making public the official progress on the case, other relatives of the disappeared were forced to relive their own stories through Ayotzinapa. According to one of the Eureka members, PGR's official version about what happened to the 43 students was traumatising as it brought back memories of her own story (Chávez Hoyos 2015). How the case was handled and the responses given by the state, even when they were more public and quicker than with other cases, followed the same pattern of impunity and of deficiencies in finding the disappeared students and bringing justice to the case. Though it had a higher profile in terms of investigation and national and international scrutiny in Mexico, the investigation showed the flaws in the Mexican political and judicial system consequently making a crisis in the system visible beyond Ayotzinapa (Amnesty International 2016a; OAS 2016b).

The duality between making visible and invisible other cases and the general phenomenon of disappearances can be exemplified with what happened at Mexico's review by the UNCED in

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<sup>109</sup> GIEI analysed these two situations in its reports (GIEI n.d.; Grupo Interdisciplinario de Expertos Independientes n.d.).



February 2015. As one of the UN Commissioners commented, no other session had been followed so widely by the media and people in general in the history of the Committee. The room was full and hundreds of people were following the events live. The fact that the session took place a few months after the students were disappeared and that one mother and one father from Ayotzinapa participated at the session created a lot of public attention. The session had been planned long before and did not focus on Ayotzinapa, but the case, nonetheless, served as a good example of how the Mexican government responds to disappearances in terms of searching for the disappeared, dealing with the relatives, and bringing justice to the cases. The high degree of impunity that has prevailed in Mexico for decades was brought up by the commissioners and used as one of the explanations for the daily occurrence of disappearances (Committee on Enforced Disappearances 2015).

The media reported widely on the issue, even though the majority focused on Ayotzinapa and provided more attention to the relatives of the 43 than to the other two mothers who had travelled for the same event (Montalvo 2015; Notimex 2015; Notimex and Afp 2015; EFE 2015). Nonetheless, the UNCED recommendations (addressing disappearances in general) gained a lot of attention in national and international media, which was used by relatives and by human rights organisations to put more pressure on the government. An example of this is how the document created by the UNCED served as a starting point to work on the lobbying of a General Law against Disappearances.<sup>110</sup>

Another example in which the visibility of the Ayotzinapa case has been used to highlight the disappearances crisis more generally is AI's report 'Treated with Indolence' published in 2016. The report focuses on the case of Ayotzinapa and on the disappearances committed in Cuauhtémoc, Chihuahua. Building on the Ayotzinapa case and on the interest this has generated, AI's report shows how the treatment received by Ayotzinapa is the rule rather than the exception in terms of the state's approach towards disappearances (Amnesty International 2016b).

The Ayotzinapa case was seen as a first step to finally acknowledge and address the problem of disappearances in Mexico. National and international media called it the final straw which made people become aware of the issue, but also in terms of dealing with it, while the IACHR described it as a 'wakeup call regarding disappearances in Mexico' (OAS 2016a, 78). The expectation was that it would finally open the door to deal with deep-rooted problems of the political system and that it could unite different movements to fight as one for justice and for the end of human rights violations. As I have explained, the majority of the attention towards the case was focused on the case itself and not on the broader problem. Nonetheless, the visibility and the momentum it gained in terms of the scrutiny of the international community towards the state regarding human rights violations in the country did serve to raise awareness of the human rights crisis. As I argued above, this moment was seized by other relatives of the disappeared to become more organised. Besides this, the visibility of this case also served for other non-organised relatives to create new organisations. The more evident example of this is the formation of 'The Other Disappeared' collective of Iguala, who look for mass

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<sup>110</sup> For more on this see Chapter 4.

graves to find their disappeared relatives in the same region where the students were disappeared.<sup>111</sup> In addition to this group, many others have been created since 2014 (Morbiato 2017, 155). It is likely that the exposure this case had in the media and the solidarity it created in the streets helped others to look for their relatives in more organised and public ways.

It is impossible to know what would have happened if the 43 Ayotzinapa students had not been disappeared but the fact that this happened and that there was a national and international movement in condemnation of these events has contributed to the evolution of the movement against disappearances in the country. As previously stated, this is largely so due to the tireless work that relatives of the disappeared and organisations working against disappearances have carried out for decades.

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<sup>111</sup> See more on this in Chapter 4.

## CONCLUSIONS

### Introduction

As Elizabeth Jelin affirms, 'memory is obstinate, it does not resign itself to remain in the past, insisting in its presence' (Jelin 2003b, XIV). Throughout this thesis, I have shown the obstinate memories of the relatives of the disappeared and human rights organisations, and the battles over them with the Mexican state. As this has been an understudied phenomenon in Mexico, this thesis aims at contributing to a gap in the literature in a developing national scholarship on disappearances, and to a regional and global literature on memory studies. I have based my analysis on 33 semi-structured interviews conducted in six cities (Chihuahua, Chihuahua; León, Guanajuato; Mexico City; Monterrey, Nuevo León; Saltillo, Coahuila; and Torreón, Coahuila) during the Spring of 2015 with a total of 34 interviewees. The use of bibliography from Mexico and beyond, as well as newspapers and magazines, have framed the discussion of this thesis. The fieldwork was done following Thomas' idea of a critical ethnography, in which how things are and how they could be, as well as the role of the researcher in social change are taken into account (Thomas 1993, 4). Besides this, I followed a psychosocial approach which takes into account the impact of violence at the individual as well as at the societal level (Beristain 2012; Beristain and Donà 2009).

I have engaged with what disappearances are and what they mean to the relatives of the disappeared, how disappearances have been carried out in Mexico mainly during two periods, and how the relatives of the disappeared have organised themselves and what their actions and relationship to the government have been during the two periods. Besides this, I have shown the battles over how disappearances have been conceptualised through the decades in Mexico and what responses have been given to the relatives of the disappeared by the state in this sense. After this, I have analysed dates and memorials to show the battles for memory and the different discourses around disappearances, highlighting the relatives' role as memory entrepreneurs and activists of meaning (Gatti 2014; Jelin 2003b). Finally, I have shown how the disappearance of 43 rural teacher-training students and the wave of solidarity created after this event have changed the panorama and visibility of disappearances in the country. Throughout the text, I have examined the continuities and ruptures in the work and responses of the relatives of the disappeared and human rights organisations of the two periods, and those on the responses given by different state actors.

### Findings

Disappearances are a new state of being, an impossible state (Gatti 2014, 30), and one where death and life are present and possible, but where uncertainty occupies all the space. To think about the relatives of the disappeared and their ways of organising and fighting, it is fundamental to understand what disappearances are, what they imply, and especially their local characteristics. If in other contexts (e.g. contemporary Argentina, Guatemala, Uruguay) disappearances are seen as deaths

without bodies or inconclusive deaths (Catela), and the situation of the relatives as an unattended grief (Panizo), the Mexican case responds better to the category of ambiguous loss in which the loved one is physically absent and psychologically present (Boss and Yeats 2014b; Robins 2010). The acknowledgement of the psychosocial impacts of the disappearances is fundamental to advance in a response that considers the victims and society in a dialectic relationship.

The failed process of transitional justice around political violence occurred during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, which was initiated in 2000 with the alternation of the party in power, as well as the limited investigations in terms of the disappearances of the second period, have impacted on the way the relatives of the disappeared engage with this phenomenon. For some of the organisations of the 1970s onwards, as well as for the majority of the organisations of the second period, and contrary to what happens in other countries, the 'Vivos los queremos' demand guides their work.

This thesis is a comparative analysis of the two periods of disappearances in Mexico. The contestation around the disappeared deals with mainly three aspects: who the disappeared are, why they have been disappeared, and who has committed the disappearances. As a context for this, I have presented a historical perspective on these three questions, which serves as a basis for a latter analysis of the battles over memory around the disappeared. In the first period, state actors used disappearances mainly as a way of dealing with political opponents. The disappeared were primarily rural and urban guerrillas, those supporting or related to the guerrillas, and other political opponents. During this period that lasted from the last 1960s to the 1980s, between 600 and 1300 people were disappeared, chiefly by the army, the political police, and paramilitary death squads.

The second period presents a different panorama. In the context of an increased militarisation during the so-called 'War on Drugs', more than 37,000 persons are 'missing' in Mexico as part of a general increase in human rights violations (F. Martínez 2018). Disappearances during this period are more complex in terms of who the perpetrators and the victims are. In relation to the former, state agents, members of organised crime and a mixture of both are responsible for disappearing people. Regarding the latter, and as affirmed by AI, anyone can be subject to disappearance (Amnesty International 2013). Disappearances for political reasons are still committed in the second period, but the majority of them appear to be motivated more by an economic than political interest. The two periods are connected by a line of impunity, by the government's implication (through its direct involvement or through its knowledge or acquiescence of the crime) and by the efforts of the relatives of the disappeared. A full understanding of the disappearances is still pending and will only be possible when a thorough investigation on the cases is carried out.

The way in which relatives of the disappeared have organised themselves to search for their loved ones, as well as the way in which they relate to the government and to other organisations is marked by their context. To present the continuities and ruptures between the organisations of the disappeared of the two periods, I selected seven organisations (three from the first period and four

from the second). During the first period, the organisations presented a highly confrontational and demanding attitude towards the government. As disappearances were committed by state actors and the disappeared were believed to be held in government facilities, the main demand was the freedom of the disappeared. The relatives organised at the local and national level, and interacted with social organisations and political parties, as well as with a regional movement of relatives of the disappeared. With their work, the relatives of the disappeared contributed to the creation of local and nationwide human rights movements, as well as to a specialised language and a legal regional (and later global) framework on disappearances.

During the second period, the organisations of relatives of the disappeared have interacted with a mix of confrontation and cooperation with local and federal governments. The close work that relatives of the disappeared have with professional human rights organisations has marked the actions of the former. In this period, the organisations of relatives of the disappeared not only raise awareness on disappearances, but they also demand the government comply with its national and international obligations in terms of disappearances. The existence of a legal framework on disappearance, along with a national and international network of human rights organisations, both as a result of the work of organisations of relatives of previous decades in Mexico and elsewhere, has set a precedent for organisations of the second period to work at a more professional and specialised level. As a result of this, the relatives of the disappeared are carrying out some of the state's responsibilities, particularly in terms of investigation, forensics, and legal work.

In both periods, the organisations of relatives of the disappeared serve for the construction of what Robledo calls *communitas*, 'which provides a specific framework for integrating ambiguity into the world of the living and providing a kind of social 'treatment' for absences' (Robledo Silvestre 2014, 8). While working together they find and create meanings for disappearances, being activists of meaning (Gatti) and at the same time they become memory entrepreneurs (Jelin), fighting to bring the disappeared to the social sphere, and to install their discourse and their memory in the public realm (Gatti 2014; Jelin 2003b).

In their role as memory entrepreneurs and activists of meaning, relatives of the disappeared and human rights organisations carry out battles for memory with the local and federal governments. These can be examined through the analysis of the conceptualisation of disappearances and the consequences this brings, along with the responses given by the federal government to disappearances in the two periods. When analysing the ways in which disappearances have been categorised by the relatives of the disappeared and by the different governments, a pattern can be found in both periods. While the relatives of the disappeared insist on talking about disappearances using that category, which highlights the responsibility of the state, different governments have responded to this using such terms as lost, missing, presumed disappeared, not found, and absent, which do not imply a state responsibility. The creation of public policies to tackle disappearances

using those terms, proves inefficient in finding the disappeared, in dealing with the relatives, and in preventing more disappearances.

Besides using different terms to refer to disappearances, another strategy used by the state has been to blame the victims. In making the victims responsible for their fate, the state creates a negative social judgement towards them; their lives are seen as precarious lives as defined by Butler: lives not worth living, and thus not worth to be mourned (Butler 2012, 2016). As Schedler argues, the way in which victims are portrayed creates a distance between an 'us' living in a civilised world, and a 'them' living in a world in which barbarism is the norm (Schedler 2015, 142). As a response to this, the actions of the relatives of the disappeared are a way of rehumanising the disappeared (Karl), filling their present absence with meaning (Gatti), thus returning them to a state of lives deserving to be lived and mourned (Gatti 2014; Karl 2014a).

In Mexico (and particularly before the disappearance of the Ayotzinapa students), the relatives of the disappeared in their role as memory entrepreneurs took the responsibility of recovering their loved ones, in many cases with the indifference of the broader community. As Nora puts it, '(t)he less memory is experienced collectively, the more it will require individuals to undertake to become themselves memory- individual' (Nora 1989, 16). As memory does not exist spontaneously, the relatives of the disappeared have then created memory realms of which dates and memorials are a few examples (Nora 1989). To analyse the battles for memory around these memory realms, it is important to think about who creates memorials and who observes certain dates, in what context, and what the intentions behind it are. The interpretation of the past has consequences for the future plans of memory and for the contestation of what version of the past will be transmitted (Bixler 2002; Kaiser 2005a; Robben 2005a). The government's discourse and position towards memorialisation in the two periods are different, but in both the relatives have carried out an intense struggle to make visible and rehumanise the disappeared.

As I have pointed out on this thesis, during the first period the government sustained a double discourse in which exiles from across the continent were received in Mexico while domestic dissidents were detained, tortured, extrajudicially executed, and disappeared. The relatives then insisted on making visible the absence of the disappeared and on highlighting the state's responsibility of these crimes. The 'silence as golden' rule that prevailed during that period was continued throughout the period of failed transitional justice initiated in 2000, in which impunity for the crimes was guaranteed. In this context, Eureka's periodical memorialisation during Mother's Day, on 28 August, as well as the creation of the House of Indomitable Memory served to rehumanise the disappeared. Furthermore, the House has operated as a memory site which serves as exemplary memory (Todorov) connecting disappearances from both periods, and as a space to acknowledge the struggle of the relatives of the disappeared (Todorov 1996). The memory that was once embodied by the members of Eureka as technologies of memory is now held in the House and shared through it (Sturken 1997).

During the process of failed transitional justice, Eureka's alliance with local entities resulted in the creation of the House, as well as in the installation of a memorial in the CDHDF. The limitations of the latter have been analysed above. The work of relatives to make the stories of their disappeared loved ones visible and to bring justice was also crystallised in the IACoHR's ruling on the Radilla case. Once more, the way in which the ruling was complied with by the Mexican government showed a disregard of the victims and a willingness to 'tick the boxes' of the ruling more than to substantively change the status quo through its implementation.

The different ways in which memorialisation of the disappeared of the second period have taken place also represent the battles for memory of this period. As discussed above, the discourse of state actors on the disappeared has consisted in blaming the victims, and then dehumanising them through the vagueness of changing figures and through the use of different categories that do not recognise the particularities of the crime, and especially of the government's responsibilities in it. According to this narrative, the disappearances of the second period have been carried out by organised crime while the Mexican government is doing everything in its power to solve them. However, as argued by the Open Society Foundation, '(t)he passage of new reforms and creation of new institutions have been used to defuse criticism in the past, with leaders claiming that the country was on the cusp of dealing with the problem' (Open Society Justice Initiative 2016a, 133). As has been explained in this thesis, the progress on this matter has to be analysed carefully as without the political will for change, the mere creation of new institutions will not bring a substantial change to the phenomenon of disappearances.

The actions carried out by the relatives are a counter discourse to that advanced by the government. During the commemorations on Mother's Day and on the International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances, as well as with the creation of the Square of the Disappeared in Nuevo León, the relatives of the disappeared fight to rehumanise their loved ones and to highlight the responsibility of the state in the crimes. As disappearances are more present in the public sphere than in the first period, and as the government's responsibility is more difficult to be established in many cases, state actors have taken a more active role in publicly creating memories of the disappeared that further the governments' discourse on the 'War on Drugs'. The actions taken by the PGR during the International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances and the creation of the memorial in Allende, Coahuila, are examples of the local and federal government's attempt of portraying an image of work and progress against disappearances, as well as a commitment to peace and reconciliation. Nonetheless, as has been pointed out by national and international organisations, these efforts have lacked a commitment with truth and justice.

In terms of memorialisation, too, the context in the two periods is essential to understand the differences. For the first period, it is only during the moments of the failed transitional justice measures that memorials are erected for the disappeared for political reasons. The ways in which the struggle for freedom was carried out before that moment reflects the relatives' insistence on their

fundamental demands and probably also the idea of memorials as spaces that would stop rather than promote memory. The relatives of the second period, as has been argued in previous chapters, have been able to learn about the struggles of the relatives elsewhere and of processes of memorials as vehicles for memory. The existence of projects like RECO that build on memory studies to resignify spaces of horror also helps relatives of the disappeared in furthering their struggles for memory.

On the other hand, local and federal governments can use memorialisation to promote a discourse of reconciliation and to further conceal the crimes, as they do by naming crimes in other ways and by creating offices that do not effectively work on solving the cases. Thus, while some ways of memorialising the disappeared are created because there is no will to remember, others are used to confront counter memories and to support the official discourse on this matter. These counter discourses, as Jelin explains, threaten 'the national consensus that is being imposed' by offering 'alternate narratives and meanings of the past' (Jelin 2003b, 27). The struggle over the transmission of the past and about its implications in the present is then reflected on these vehicles of memory.

These battles over the transmission of memories around the disappeared have been especially strong around the disappearance of 43 rural teacher-training students in September 2014. Due to a series of factors (e.g. the moment in which disappearances were committed; the particularities of the attacked group; the quickness and effectiveness of the response by schoolmates of the disappeared, relatives of the disappeared and human rights organisations; the way in which the victims were constructed; and the national and international response) this event was accompanied by large sectors of civil society, occupying the centre of the public debate. The case had a dual effect by, on the one hand, making other cases invisible, and on the other hand making the broader disappearance crisis more visible.

The case was first constructed as literal memory, making invisible other cases and other organisations of relatives of the disappeared (Todorov 1996). Nonetheless, the national and international attention gained by the case was seized by other relatives of the disappeared and human rights organisations to make the general disappearances crisis visible, converting that literal memory into an exemplary memory (Todorov 1996). The attention drawn by the case has been used by other relatives to become more organised, more public, and to dialogue with the government from a different place as the national and international attention on the matter have increased. The way in which the state has dealt with the Ayotzinapa case has shed light on a general way of responding to human rights violations and particularly to disappearances, in what AI has called 'a treatment of indolence' (Amnesty International 2016b).

## **Limitations**

This thesis is an account of the battles for memory around the disappeared in Mexico in two main periods in which disappearances have been committed at a major scale and at the national level. A



first limitation of the research has been precisely the delimitation of these two periods which has been done for analytical reasons. Even though identifying these periods benefit the analysis, it has to be taken into account that disappearances have been committed also between these two periods and that the modality of disappearances that have taken part during the so-called 'War on Drugs' started years before the official declaration of this strategy. Nonetheless, it was after this declaration and with the increased militarisation across the country that these disappearances became a generalised phenomenon in parts of the country, as established by the UNCED (Committee on Enforced Disappearances 2015).

A second limitation has to do with the scope of this thesis in terms of the analysed cases. To shed light on the actions of the relatives of the disappeared I have examined the history, relationships, and work of seven organisations. As commented above, at the time of preparing the project for this thesis there were around 20 organisations of relatives of the disappeared. The number has now increased to more than 50 organisations. Within these organisations there is a great diversity of stances, ways of working, of relating to the government, and even of positioning towards the possibility of life and death of the disappeared. Therefore, the findings of this thesis represent a small but significant sample of a greater universe.

Connected to the last point is another limitation of this work, which resides in the fact that disappearances, both in the field and in the sense of the scholarly interest in them, are rapidly increasing and changing. The actual figure of people disappeared is uncertain, but since this work started, the official figure on missing people has increased from 22,000 in 2013 to more than 37,000 in 2018. Along with the increase on people disappeared, more organisations have been created and, as analysed in chapter 7, the presence of the topic in the public debate has increased as well. In a relatively short period of time, from when I conducted fieldwork in 2015 until I write this in 2018, the national panorama on disappearances has greatly changed. As a result, the thesis has also changed with time, but will also probably reflect having been written in a turning point regarding disappearances.

## **Future Research**

Over the last few years, the scholarship on disappearances in Mexico has increased. Universities and research centres have created projects on violence, peace and human rights, and publications on human rights and disappearances are more present in academic outlets than five years ago. The present work will contribute to this growing field of study on disappearances in Mexico. In developing this research, I have identified at least three areas for further research: i) victims, ii) memory, and iii) responses to disappearances.

### i) Victims

There are three main topics that would be important to study in terms of the victims. First, a full investigation into who the victims are and how disappearances have been carried out historically in the country.<sup>112</sup> Second, research on who the disappeared are would also imply studies of particular ways of organising and memorialising around different vulnerable groups (e.g. indigenous communities, migrants, children, women, journalists, and human rights defenders). Connected to this, a third topic for study could deal with how victims are defined and which victims are mourned and elicit solidarity and which ones do not. I have analysed in this thesis the way in which the Ayotzinapa case generated a movement around it. The reflections on this issue raise questions on how different cases of human rights violations create -or not- solidarity around them, and what factors intervene for this to happen. Ultimately, this is a discussion on why only some victims are considered grievable but others are not (Butler 2012).

### ii) Memory

This thesis has explored some ways in which battles for memory have been carried out around disappearances in Mexico, particularly in terms of the categorisation of the crimes, and of some dates and memorials that work as vehicles for memory (Jelin 2003b). Additional studies could explore the diverse local processes in this regard, as well as other forms of memorialisation. There is a broad range of memory vehicles, from theatre plays, songs, and films, to projects like 'Footprints of memory' and 'Embroidering for peace', to name a few, which would provide interesting insights to think about disappearances in both periods. Moreover, it could be enlightening to address the battles over archives regarding disappearances, which at the end are battles over the access to the right to the truth.

### iii) Responses to Disappearances

The present thesis has analysed the ways in which relatives of the disappeared and human rights organisations, on the one hand, and the different governments, on the other, have responded to disappearances. Further studies could engage with the role of other actors in this regard. Important actors would be the established and alternative media, the Church, and the business sectors. Besides this, a study on the role of women in the struggle against disappearances could be carried out. The predominance of women in these struggles has been widely mentioned in the literature, but there is still a gap in terms of the motivations and the consequences of this differentiated work against disappearances. Finally, an in-depth study of the historical development of the social movement against disappearances will be important as a base for future studies on disappearances in Mexico. This thesis and the analysis of the seven organisations presented here, will serve as an important basis for this.

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<sup>112</sup> The project 'persons not rows' (personas no renglones) analyses the National Registry on Disappeared Persons' database. According to this project, the analysis is done as a step for truth and justice (Reza M. 2017).

## Final thoughts

While I write this final section of the thesis, a General Law on Enforced Disappearances and Disappearances committed by Private Citizens has been sanctioned by President Peña Nieto. This new Law is the result of the organised and collaborative work of dozens of human rights NGOs and, predominantly, of dozens of organisations of relatives of the disappeared. The permanent work of the relatives of the disappeared, along with the increased national and international attention to this problem in recent years, has opened the space for this Law to be passed. If implemented efficiently, this Law will imply the Creation of a National Search System, a National Search Commission, a National Civic Council, as well as federal and local special prosecutor's offices to deal with disappearances ('DECRETO Por El Que Se Expide La Ley General En Materia de Desaparición Forzada de Personas, Desaparición Cometida Por Particulares y Del Sistema Nacional de Búsqueda de Personas, y Se Reforman y Derogan Diversas Disposiciones Del Código Penal Federal y de La Ley General de Salud.' 2017; 'Ley General Sobre Desapariciones Forzadas y Desapariciones Por Particulares' 2015; 'Implementar Con Eficiencia La Ley de Desaparición, Exigen Familiares' 2017).

As the sanction of the Law shows, the battles for memory around the disappeared that started in the 1970s in Mexico will keep on developing as relatives of the disappeared continue to search for their loved ones, and continue to make their absence present. The meanings of past disappearances will continue to be disputed in a context in which organisations and relatives of the disappeared struggle to put a stop to disappearances. The understanding of past battles and of the disputes around disappearances, and the way in which relatives of the disappeared and organisations on the one hand, and the different governments on the other hand, have dealt with disappearances will serve as a base to analyse an ever-changing situation in which disappearances are gaining more public attention. This thesis aims to contribute to the development of a critical scholarship to accompany those creating meaning around disappearances in Mexico and elsewhere, and places victims of disappearances and their relatives at the centre.

## APPENDIX 1: ACRONYMS

ACG: Asociación Cívica Guerrerense: (Guerreran Civic Association)

ACNR: Asociación Cívica Nacional Revolucionaria (Revolutionary National Civic Association)

AFADEM: Asociación de Familiares de Detenidos Desaparecidos en México (Association of Relatives of Detained Disappeared in Mexico)

CADHAC: Ciudadanos en Apoyo a los Derechos Humanos A.C. (Citizens in Support of Human Rights)

CCG: Comité Cívico Guerrerense (Guerreran Civic Committee)

CDHDF: Comisión de Derechos Humanos del Distrito Federal (Federal District's Human Rights Commission)

CEAV: Comisión Ejecutiva de Atención a Víctimas (Executive Commission for the Attention of Victims)

CEBs: Comunidades Eclesiales de Base (Christian Base Communities)

CEDEHM: Centro de Derechos Humanos de las Mujeres (Centre for Women's Human Rights)

CNDH: Comisión Nacional de Derechos Humanos (National Commission for Human Rights)

DFS: Dirección Federal de Seguridad (Federal Security Directorate)

EAAF: Equipo Argentino de Antropología Forense (Argentinian Team of Forensic Anthropology)

EZLN: Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (Zapatista Army of National Liberation)

FEDEFAM: Federación Latinoamericana de Asociaciones de Familiares de Personas Desaparecidas (Latin American Federation of Associations of Relatives of Disappeared Persons)

FEMOSPP: Fiscalía especial para la atención de hechos probablemente constitutivos de delitos federales cometidos directa o indirectamente por servidores públicos en contra de personas vinculadas con movimientos sociales y políticos del pasado (Special Prosecutor's Office for the Attention of Facts Probably Constitutive of Federal Crimes Committed Directly or Indirectly by Public Servers Against People Involved in Social and Political Movements of the Past)

FUUNDEC: Fuerzas Unidas por Nuestros Desaparecidos en Coahuila (United Forces for Our Disappeared in Coahuila)

FUUNDEM: Fuerzas Unidas por Nuestros Desaparecidos en México (United Forces for Our Disappeared in Mexico)

FUNDENL: Fuerzas Unidas por Nuestros Desaparecidos en Nuevo León (United Forces for Our Disappeared in Nuevo León)

GIEI: Grupo Interdisciplinario de Expertos Independientes (Interdisciplinary Group of Independent Experts)

H.I.J.O.S. México: Hijos e Hijas por la Identidad y la Justicia contra el Olvido y el Silencio (H.I.J.O.S. Mexico - Sons and Daughters for Identity and Justice against Oblivion and Silence)

LOCATEL: Servicio Público de Localización Telefónica (Public Service of Telephonic Localisation)

MP: Ministerio Público (Public Prosecutor)

PAN: Partido Acción Nacional (National Action Party)

PCM: Partido Comunista Mexicano (Mexican Communist Party)

PDLP: Partido de los Pobres (Party of the Poor)

PGR: Procuraduría General de la República (Republic's Attorney General)

PRD: Partido de la Revolución Democrática (Democratic Revolution Party)

PRT: Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores (Workers' Revolutionary Party)

PRI: Partido Revolucionario Institucional (Institutional Revolutionary Party)

PT: Partido del Trabajo (Labour Party)

UNCED: United Nations Committee on Enforced Disappearances

UNWGEID: United Nations Working Group on Enforced and Involuntary Disappearances

**APPENDIX 2: ORGANISATIONS WORKING AGAINST DISAPPEARANCES ORGANISED BY STATE**

Aguascalientes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Red de Organizaciones en Búsqueda de Personas en Aguascalientes</li> </ul>
Baja California	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Asociación Unidos por los Desaparecidos de Baja California</li> </ul>
Chiapas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Comité-Familias Unidas de Chiapas Buscando a Nuestros Migrantes 'Junax Ko'otontik'</li> </ul>
Chihuahua	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Centro de Derechos Humanos de las Mujeres (CEDEHM)</li> <li>• Colectivo madres unidas</li> <li>• Comité de Madres de Desaparecidos de Chihuahua *(not active)</li> <li>• Familiares organizados con Centro de Derechos Humanos Paso del Norte</li> <li>• Familiares organizadas con Red Mesa de Mujeres Chihuahua</li> <li>• Justicia para Nuestras Hijas</li> <li>• Nuestras hijas de regreso a casa</li> </ul>
Ciudad de México	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Comité de Familiares de Detenidos Desaparecidos 'Hasta Encontrarlos'</li> <li>• H.I.J.O.S. México</li> <li>• Nacidos en la Tempestad</li> </ul>
Coahuila	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alas de Esperanza</li> <li>• Familias Unidas en la Búsqueda y Localización de Desaparecidos de Piedras Negras (Coahuila)</li> <li>• Fuerzas Unidas por Nuestros Desaparecidos en Coahuila (FUUNDEC)</li> <li>• Grupo V.I.D.A., Víctimas por sus Derechos en Acción</li> </ul>
Estado de México	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Uniendo Cristales</li> </ul>
Guanajuato	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fuerzas Unidas por Nuestros Desaparecidos en México</li> </ul>
Guerrero	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Asociación de Familiares de detenidos desaparecidos y víctimas de violación de los derechos humanos en México (AFADDEM)</li> <li>• Comité de Familiares y Amigos de Secuestrados, Desaparecidos y Asesinados en Guerrero</li> <li>• Los Otros Desaparecidos de Iguala</li> <li>• Siempre Vivos (Chilapa)</li> <li>• Taller de Desarrollo Comunitario (TADECO)</li> </ul>
Hidalgo	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Juntos por Hidalgo</li> </ul>
Jalisco	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Familias Unidas por Nuestros Desaparecidos Jalisco, FUNDEJ</li> <li>• Por Amor A Ellxs</li> </ul>
Michoacán	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Comité de Familiares de Detenidos Desaparecidos en México (COFADDEM)</li> <li>• Familiares caminando por justicia</li> </ul>
Morelos	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Búsqueda de Familiares: Regresando a Casa Morelos A.C.</li> <li>• Frente de Víctimas del Estado de Morelos</li> <li>• Víctimas y Ofendidos del Estado de Morelos, A.C.</li> </ul>
Nuevo León	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agrupación de Mujeres Organizadas por los Ejecutados, Secuestrados y Desaparecidos de Nuevo León, AMORES</li> <li>• Fuerzas Unidas por Nuestros Desaparecidos en Nuevo León (FUNDENL)</li> </ul>
Oaxaca	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hasta Encontrarlos (national)</li> </ul>
Querétaro	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Desaparecidos justicia A.C.</li> </ul>
San Luis Potosí	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unidos en Búsqueda de Nuestros Desaparecidos SLP</li> <li>• Voz y Dignidad por los nuestros SLP</li> </ul>
Sinaloa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Desaparecidos de El Fuerte Sinaloa-Las Rastreadoras</li> <li>• Unión de familiares de desaparecidos de Sinaloa en los años 70s/Unión de madres de desaparecidos de Sinaloa en los años 70s.</li> </ul>
Sonora	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Guerreras en Búsqueda de Nuestros Tesoros Guaymas</li> </ul>
Tamaulipas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Centro de Derechos Humanos de Nuevo Laredo</li> <li>• Comunidad Ciudadana en Búsqueda de Desaparecidos en Tamaulipas</li> <li>• Red de Desaparecidos Tamaulipas</li> </ul>
Veracruz	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Buscando a los Desaparecidos y Desaparecidas de Jalapa</li> </ul>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Búsqueda Colectiva Coatzacoalcos</li> <li>• Colectivo por la Paz Jalapa</li> <li>• Familiares de Desaparecidos y Desaparecidas de Xalapa</li> <li>• Familiares de Orizaba y Córdoba, Veracruz</li> <li>• Grupo Buscando a nuestros desaparecidos y desaparecidas</li> <li>• Madres en Búsqueda Coatzacoalcos</li> <li>• Solecito de Veracruz</li> </ul>
Zacatecas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Familias unidas en busca de una esperanza</li> </ul>
National	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Brigada Nacional en Búsqueda de Personas Desaparecidas</li> <li>• Campaña Nacional contra la desaparición forzada de personas</li> <li>• Comité Eureka</li> <li>• Familiares en Búsqueda María Herrera, A.C.</li> <li>• Fuerzas Unidas por Nuestros Desaparecidos en México (FUUNDEM)</li> <li>• Movimiento por la Paz con Justicia y Dignidad (MPJyD)</li> <li>• Movimiento por Nuestros Desaparecidos en México</li> <li>• Plataforma de Víctimas de Desaparición Forzada en México</li> <li>• Red de Madres Buscando a sus Hijos, A.C.</li> <li>• Red Eslabones por los Derechos Humanos</li> <li>• Red Nacional de Enlaces</li> </ul>
Transnational	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Comité de Familias Migrantes Desaparecidos del Salvador COFAMIDE</li> <li>• Movimiento Migrante Mesoamericano-Caravana de Madres Centroamericanas</li> <li>• Personas Migrantes Desaparecidas de Guatemala</li> </ul>

This list is not exhaustive as there probably are groups which I have not come across during the research. I have only listed the states where I have knowledge of the existence of organisations.


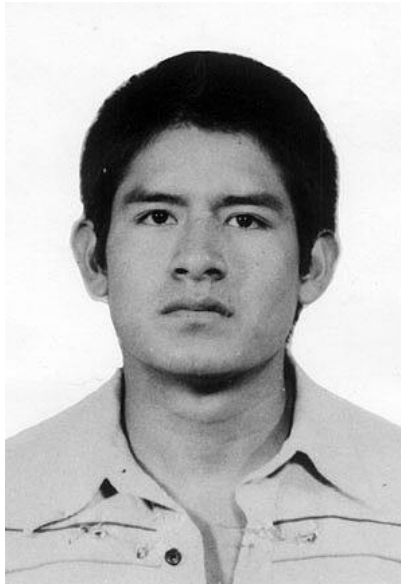

### APPENDIX 3: INTERVIEWEES

Interviewees were asked if they wanted to remain anonymous. All of them acceded to their names appearing in this thesis. Here I present a list in alphabetical order of them and the context in which they were interviewed. Even though I have only included in this section pictures of the disappeared relatives of my interviewees, by working in these organisations, both relatives and non-relatives are looking for the disappeared in general and for an end on disappearances. The affiliation and positions correspond to where they worked when the interviews were carried out.




#### a) Relatives of the Disappeared


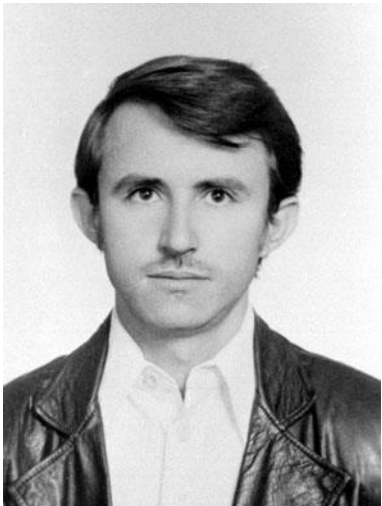

Name	Interview Date	Organisation	Looking for	Picture of the Disappeared Person
Barajas E. Virginia	05/05/2015	FUNDEM	Looking for her son Juan Ricardo Rodríguez Barajas, who was disappeared on September 24, 2011 in Zacatecas.	
Castellanos López, María Luisa	25/04/2015	FUNDENL	Looking for her husband and brother-in-law, Nicolás and Reyes López Reséndiz who were disappeared on March 28, 2011 in the highway Monterrey-Tamaulipas.	<p><b>Desaparecido</b></p>  <p>Nicolás Flores Reséndiz Desaparecido desde: 28 de marzo 2011 Carretera Monterrey a Tamaulipas</p>






				<p><b>Desaparecido</b></p>  <p>Reyes Flores Reséndiz Desaparecido desde: 28 de marzo 2011 Carretera Monterrey a Tamaulipas</p>
Chávez Hoyos, Priscila	23/03/2015	Comité Eureka	Looking for her brother Juan Chávez Hoyos, who was disappeared on September 8, 1978 in Mexico City.	
De Jesús Ventura, María del Carmen	09/04/2015	CEDEHM	Looking for her son, Arturo Chacón de Jesús who was disappeared along with other eight persons on February 18, 2013 in Chihuahua.	

<p>De los Ríos Merino, Alicia</p>	<p>09/04/2015</p>	<p>Comité de Madres con Hijos Desaparecidos de Chihuahua</p>	<p>Looking for her mother Alicia De los Ríos Merino, who was disappeared on January 5, 1978 in Mexico City.</p>	
<p>Flores Coronado, Oscar</p>	<p>17/04/2015</p>	<p>FUUNDEC</p>	<p>Looking for his son Jesús Daniel Flores García, who was disappeared on May 1, 2010 in Coahuila.</p>	<p><b>Desaparecido</b></p>  <p><b>Jesús Daniel Flores García</b>  <b>Desaparecido desde: 01 de mayo de 2010</b>  <b>En: Torreón, Coahuila</b></p>
<p>Flores M., Laura</p>	<p>15/04/2015</p>	<p>FUUNDEC</p>	<p>Looking for her son, Julio González Flores, who was disappeared on May 8, 2011 in Tamaulipas.</p>	




<p>Flores Santoyo, Beatriz Elena</p>	<p>02/05/2015</p>	<p>FUNDEM</p>	<p>Looking for her son, José Antonio Ángeles Flores, who was disappeared on February 23, 2012 in Coahuila.</p>	
<p>Fragoso Gutiérrez, Lilia</p>	<p>08/04/2015</p>	<p>CEDEHM</p>	<p>Looking for her husband, David Fuentes González, who was disappeared on February 10, 2013 along with eight persons, in Chihuahua.</p>	
<p>Gálvez Girón, Jorge Humberto</p>	<p>17/03/2015</p>	<p>Comité Eureka, Casa de la Memoria Indómita</p>	<p>Looking for his brother-in-law Jesús Piedra Ibarra, who was disappeared on April 18, 1975 in Nuevo León.</p>	




<p>Hernández Alarcón, Lourdes</p>	<p>09/04/2015</p>	<p>Justicia para Nuestras Hijas*</p>	<p>Looking for her daughter Pamela Leticia Portillo Hernández, who was disappeared on July 25, 2010 in Chihuahua.</p>	
<p>Hernández de Ramírez Duarte, Sara</p>	<p>14/03/2015</p>	<p>Comité Eureka</p>	<p>Looking for her husband Rafael Ramírez Duarte, who was disappeared on June 9, 1977 in Mexico City.</p>	
<p>Herrera del Llano, María de Lourdes</p>	<p>15/04/2015</p>	<p>FUUNDEC</p>	<p>Looking for her son Brandon Esteban Acosta Herrera, her husband Esteban Acosta Rodríguez and her two brothers-in-law, Gualberto Acosta Rodríguez and Gerardo Acosta Rodríguez, who were disappeared on August 29, 2009 in Coahuila.</p>	

				 <p><b>Desaparecido</b></p>  <p><b>Gualberto Acosta Rodriguez</b> Desaparecido desde: 29 de agosto de 2009 En: Ramos Arizpe, Coahuila</p> <p><b>Desaparecido</b></p>  <p><b>Gerardo Acosta Rodriguez</b> Desaparecido desde: 29 de agosto de 2009 En: Ramos Arizpe, Coahuila</p>
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<p>Hidalgo Rea, Irma Leticia</p>	<p>25/04/2015</p>	<p>FUNDENL</p>	<p>Looking for her son Roy Rivera Hidalgo, who was disappeared on January 11, 2011 in Nuevo León.</p>	<p><b>Desaparecido</b></p>  <p><b>Roy Rivera Hidalgo</b> Desaparecido desde: 11 de enero de 2011 En: San Nicolás de los Garza, Nuevo León</p>
<p>Huerta Tarrega, María de Lourdes</p>	<p>25/04/2015</p>	<p>FUNDENL</p>	<p>Looking for her son, who was disappeared on August 12, 2010 in Nuevo León.</p>	<p><b>Desaparecido</b></p>  <p><b>Kristian Karim Flores Huerta</b> Desaparecido desde: 12 de agosto de 2010 En: Juárez, Nuevo León</p>
<p>Muñoz González, Luisa</p>	<p>09/04/2015</p>	<p>CEDEHM</p>	<p>Looking for her son Luis Romo Muñoz, who was disappeared on June 19, 2011 in Chihuahua, along with seven men of their family.</p>	



<p>Piedra Ibarra, Claudia Isabel</p>	<p>22/04/2015</p>	<p>Comité Eureka</p>	<p>Looking for her brother Jesús Piedra Ibarra, who was disappeared on April 18, 1975 in Nuevo León.</p>	
<p>Ramírez Ortiz, María del Carmen</p>	<p>17/04/2015</p>	<p>FUUNDEC</p>	<p>Looking for her son Armando Salas Ramírez and her brother Pedro Ramírez Ortiz, who were disappeared on May 12, 2008 in Coahuila.</p>	<p><b>Desaparecido</b></p>  <p><b>Armando Salas Ramírez</b> Desaparecido desde: 12 de mayo de 2008 En: Torreón, Coahuila</p> <p><b>Desaparecido</b></p>  <p><b>Pedro Ramírez Ortiz</b> Desaparecido desde: 12 de mayo del 2008 En: Torreón Coahuila</p>

<p>Ramírez Sánchez, María del Socorro</p>	<p>21/04/2015</p>	<p>AMORES</p>	<p>Looking for her son, Mauro Leal Ramírez who was disappeared on January 14, 2015 in Tamaulipas.</p>	
<p>Romo Salas, Antonio Fernando</p>	<p>09/04/2015</p>	<p>CEDEHM</p>	<p>Looking for her son Luis Romo Muñoz, who was disappeared on June 19, 2011 in Chihuahua, along with seven men of their family.</p>	
<p>Solís Reyna, Alicia</p>	<p>24/04/2015</p>	<p>AMORES</p>	<p>Looking for her son Marco Antonio Zúñiga Solís, who was disappeared on June 19, 2007 in Nuevo León.</p>	



<p>Valdivia Hernández, Lourdes</p>	<p>05/05/2015</p>	<p>FUNDEM</p>	<p>Looking for her son, Juan Diego Cordero Valdivia and her husband José Diego Cordero Anguiano, who were disappeared on December 6, 2010 in the municipality of El Plateado de Joaquín Amaro, Zacatecas.</p>	
<p>Verástegui González, Jorge Alberto</p>	<p>15/04/2015</p>	<p>FUUNDEC/ Centro de Derechos Humanos Fray Juan de Larios</p>	<p>Looking for his brother and nephew, Antonio Verástegui González and Antonio de Jesús Verástegui Escobedo, who were disappeared on January 24, 2009 in Coahuila.</p>	<p><b>Desaparecido</b></p>  <p>Antonio Verástegui González Desaparecido desde: 24 de enero de 2009 En: Parras de la Fuente, Coahuila</p>

				<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Desaparecido</b></p>  <p style="text-align: center;">Antonio de Jesús Verástegui Escobedo Desaparecido desde: 24 de enero de 2009 En: Parras de la Fuente, Coahuila</p>
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**b) Members of Human Rights Organisations**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Interview Date</b>	<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Position</b>
Carrillo García, Lorena	09/04/2015	Justicia para Nuestras Hijas*	Social Outreach Area
Gómez Caballero, Alma	10/04/2015	CEDEHM	Administration Coordinator
Gómez Escárcega, Gabino	07/04/2015	CEDEHM	Forcibly Disappeared Persons and Human Rights Defenders Area
González Ramírez, Jesús	24/04/2015	FUNDENL	Supporter
López García, María de los Ángeles	05/05/2015	Centro de Derechos Humanos Victoria Díez	Director
López Ovalle, Edith	03/03/2015	H.I.J.O.S. Mexico	Member
Martínez Bustos, Blanca Isabel	16/04/2015	Centro de Derechos Humanos Fray Juan de Larios	Director
Sáenz Solís, Martha Paola	08/04/2015	CEDEHM	Communications
Sánchez Reyna, Liz Ivett	23/04/2015	CADHAC	Education Area

Torres Martínez, Karla L.	21/04/2017	CADHAC	Communications
Vázquez, Ignacio	25/03/2015	Casa de la Memoria Indómita	Curator

\* As commented in the Introduction, Justicia para Nuestras Hijas had been selected as a case of study, but it was not possible to carry out the interviews needed so it could not be included as a case.

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