

## The quadruple disappearance: Analytical proposal to reflect the social and media representation of the victims of disappearance in Jalisco, Mexico

*La cuádruple desaparición: propuesta analítica para reflexionar la representación social y mediática de las víctimas de desaparición en Jalisco, México*

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### ABSTRACT

This article is a documentary and contextual review of the disappearance of people in Jalisco, Mexico between 2006 and 2018. Disappearance is a crime against humanity, which has increased since the Mexican State declared war against the organized crime in 2006. The inaction of the authorities facing this grievous crisis on human rights has forced the families of the disappeared to lead their search, in life and in death. Therefore, the objective of the text is a critical analysis the political and media discourse which has reduced the disappeared to just statistics, confining their media and social representation to a figure where the criminalization of the victim has more importance than the demand of justice for the amount of Human Rights that are being violated. This article found that a person in Mexico does not disappear once, but four times: 1) physical, where their human right to freedom is denied; 2) juridical-administrative, in which they're reduced to an statistic, disregarding their right to equality and juridical security; 3) social-symbolic, where they're criminalized, and stigmatized taking away their right to presumption of innocence; and 4) media, in which they're victimized again, violating their right to dignity.

Palabras clave: Physical, Legal-Administrative, Media and Social-Symbolic Disappearance.

### RESUMEN

El presente artículo es una revisión documental y contextual de la desaparición de personas en Jalisco, México entre 2006 y 2018. La desaparición es un crimen de lesa humanidad, que ha aumentado desde que el Estado Mexicano declaró la guerra contra el crimen organizado en 2006. La inacción de las autoridades ante esta grave crisis de derechos humanos ha forzado a las familias de los desaparecidos a realizar su búsqueda, tanto en la vida como en la muerte. Por tanto, el objetivo del texto se centra en el análisis crítico del discurso político y mediático que ha reducido a los desaparecidos sólo a estadísticas, confinando su representación social y mediática a una figura donde la criminalización de la víctima tiene más importancia que la exigencia de justicia alrededor de los derechos humanos que le han sido violentados. En este sentido, el artículo encontró que una persona en México no desaparece una vez, sino cuatro: 1) física, donde se niega su derecho humano a la libertad; 2) jurídico-administrativo, en el que se reduce a una estadística, sin tener en cuenta su derecho a la igualdad y la seguridad jurídica; 3) social-simbólica, donde son criminalizados y estigmatizados eliminando su derecho a la presunción de inocencia; y 4) mediática, en la cual son re-victimizado nuevamente, violando su derecho a la dignidad.

Key words: Desaparición Física, Jurídico-Administrativa, Mediática y Socia-Simbólica.

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## 1.- INTRODUCTION

“We must build a collective memory facing the disappearances, because if we don’t, the powerful (The State) will come and tell us this didn’t happen... that it wasn’t true”.

*Leticia Hidalgo, mother of Roy Rivera, forcibly disappeared on January 11th, 2011, in San Nicolás de Los Garza, Nuevo León.*

Even though they’re here, eternally present, not much is spoken about the disappeared in Mexico; because, for many –including the State- it is unimportant to know who were the 34 thousand 268 people that are disappeared right now. All of them, women, men, adults, young people and children that one good day had restricted their human right to freedom under the setting of a failed security strategy that started on December 11th, 2006. On this day the former President of Mexico, Felipe Calderón, made a war declaration against all the drug trafficking groups that operated on the country.

Under the setting of this war, the civil society has been the most vulnerable sector, such as the most violated on matter of their human rights, because in Mexico, 226 thousand 024 people have been murdered (SESNSP, 2018); 36 thousand 265 people have been disappeared (RNPED, 2018) and 310 thousand 527 more have been displaced from their territories because of the violence (CMDPDH, 2017)<sup>2</sup>.

However despite these alarming statistics, the Mexican State during two administrations, Felipe Calderón’s (2006-2012) and Enrique Peña Nieto’s (2012-2018), has systematically denied the existence of a Human Rights crisis. It even has reiterated on several occasions before international organisms, like the Inter-American Court of Human Rights and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), that a setting of rights exists in the country and guarantees the enjoyment and respect of all Human Rights.

As counterpart, these same organizations have marked out that in Mexico, human rights violations are being committed systematically; a similar conclusion was derived on the commission of crimes against humanity, such as: murder, torture, forced disappearance, forced displacement, extrajudicial executions and arbitrary detentions.

The 7th article from the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (subscribed by Mexico since January, 2006), defines a crime against humanity as: “a generalized or systematic attack against a civil population and with knowledge of said attack”. The same statute defines that this attack is “a conduct line that implicates the multiple commission of acts (...) against a civil population, in accordance to a State’s or organization’s politics to commit this attack” (CPI, 2002; p.3). Crimes against humanity can be perpetuated by governmental forces, such as organized armed groups (Open Society Justice Initiative, 2006).

Some of the crimes against humanity that have been committed on Mexico according to the international principles in terms of Human Rights, are: the disappearance of the 43 students of the Escuela Normal Rural “Raúl Isidro Burgos” de Ayotzinapa, which happened on September 26th, 2014 on Iguala, Guerrero; the extrajudicial execution of 15 civilians in hands of the Mexican Army, which happened in Tlatlaya, Estado de México, on June 30th, 2014; the “grave violations” suffered by 49 migrants found lifeless in Cadereyta, Nuevo León, on May 2012; the disappearance, torture and homicides committed against 72 migrants in San

<sup>2</sup> The number of victims of violence were accounted from January 1st, 2006 to April 30th, 2018. The current federal government of Andrés Manuel López Obrador has recognized that the number of missing persons exceeds 40 thousand; However, official data on the number of missing persons has not been updated since April 2018.

Fernando, Tamaulipas, between August 22nd and August 23rd, 2010. These are just some of the cases that received more social and media attention on the past years. Let's remember that crimes against humanity are crimes that do not prescribe or can be attached to any kind of amnesty or legal immunity, in which not only is needed to judge and consign the material authors, but every single one who had participated in the commission of the felony. Especially, the hierarchical superiors which, by action, omission, inaction or collusion had a link with the facts.

To this adverse panorama we would have to add also that Mexico is one of the countries in the world in which human rights defenders take mayor risks, because in the last 11 years, 106 activists and/or defenders of human rights have been murdered (Red TDT, 2017). Regarding the broader freedom of expression and press, 117 journalists have lost their life and 23 are disappeared right now (Article 19, 2018). Even though a Law for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders and Journalists exists since June 2012, and a Protection and Defense Mechanism that detaches from the same law, these crimes are not just unpunished but also the majority of them are not linked to activism or journalistic exercise as one of the possible causes of death or disappearance.

The last update from the National Human Rights Commission (CNDH), that retrieves the violations to Human Rights in Mexico during 2017, registered an increase of 117 percent on recommendations by the presumed violations to Human Rights on public instances like the Office of the General Prosecutor (PGR), and the National Security Commission (CNS). This incidence propitiated the organism to announce 97 recommendations; in which five stood out by crimes against humanity and eight stood out for torture acts committed by different areas of Public Security. The ombudsman, Luis Raúl González Pérez specified:

“Mexico hasn't experienced a significant and objective act towards a higher respect on Human Rights, it hasn't either managed to strengthen our democratic environment of Rights neither has accomplished to positively modify the environment which, when the sexennial (of Enrique Peña Nieto) started, millions of Mexicans had already faced: insecurity and violence, impunity and corruption, inequality and poverty” (CNDH, 2018; p. 11).

As a response, the President Peña Nieto answered that in spite of the criticism regarding the protection of human rights his government is “moving forward on the right direction”.

The Movimiento por Nuestros Desaparecidos en México (Movement for our disappeared in Mexico) – a collective that engages more than 30 collectives from relatives of disappeared people in the country- has named Enrique Peña Nieto's administration as: “The sexennial of disappearances”. In his rule not only the 43 normalistas of Ayotzinapa –icon of the disappearances inside and outside the country- disappeared, but also 20 thousand 351 people disappeared, which corresponds to 60 percent of all the disappearances.

## 2.- THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical support of this article rests on two concepts: necropolitics (Mbembe, 2011) and gore capitalism (Valencia, 2016); the first concept refers to the use of social and political power to dictate how some people can live and how some should die; the second concept it is an analysis tool that focus the economic, sociopolitical landscape, symbolic and cultural Mexican affected and rewritten by drug trafficking; in both, the key is the understanding of violence as the main articulator of power and terror caused not only to the violent bodies but also to all those that are conceived as possible goods to which they can be disappeared or for economic and territorial control purposes.

Through his dissertation he will realize that the disappearance of people in Mexico is based, in part, on an economy of death that sees the disappeared, mainly young people, as a commodity that they can exchan-

ge and reuse to achieve the objectives (economic and power) pursued by the various drug cartels in their collusion with the Mexican State.

At the same time, a dissertation on the evolution of the concept is presented: disappeared, and on which its current conceptual inability is needed to account for the characteristics that disappearances have in Mexico today, which are not associated - as in the past- to the political-ideological positions of the disappeared, because now the center is not in the disappearance of the so-called enemy, but in the disappearance of people who allow narcomaquinaria (Reguillo, 2011) to maintain and enhance the functioning of the death economy that now prevails in Mexico.

This theoretical analysis focuses on the way in which the *Cártel Jalisco Nueva Generación* has been carrying out the disappearance of people in Jalisco, a state where the main victims of this crime are young people who are then employed for the sowing and production of drugs, the sicariate or the sex trade.

#### The wider context of disappearance and the disappeared

Disappearance is, in juridical terms, a crime that consists in “the arrest, detention, kidnapping or any other way of deprivation of liberty”. In fact, the Declaration on the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance states that this crime can be the “work of State agents or people or groups of people that act with the authorization, support or acquiescence of the State”. A disappearance is considered as existent when it is given “the negative to recognize this deprivation of liberty or the hiding of the fate or whereabouts of the missing person, subtracting it to the protection of the law” (ONU, 1993; p.1)<sup>3</sup>.

Disappearance is therefore an offence that is not time-barred, as it not only involves the moment when the person is disappeared but also includes all moments after the disappearance. The protection of the State, in this sense, must go beyond the investigation of why the disappearance occurred and who is responsible, since it must also include attention to all the grievances that the disappearance generates in the victim’s family. They are disappeared and thus victim of a crime, not just someone that suffers a condition of absence or non-localization, as generally are pointed out in the Mexican State and their multiple government organs. Thus, someone can be considered as missing when, product of a Human Rights violation, a person or a group of them deliberately decide to deprive them from their liberty. In this context, disappearance constitutes a crime that is not only permanent but also being prolonged day by day.

A huge part of this international juridical acknowledgment of disappearance and enforced disappearance we owe to the fights, complaints and organization of collectives of relatives from the detained-disappeared<sup>4</sup> that denounced this crime systematically. This originated mainly under the frame of the military

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<sup>3</sup> The first international recognition on disappearances occurred on September 20th, 1978, when the United Nations published the resolution 33/173; which insisted that all the member countries: “assign the necessary resources to the search of missing people, in application to the law and respect of people’s Human Rights” (ONU, 1978; p.166). Since this date, disappearance is known as an aggravating and flagrant violation to Human Rights. This was reassured by the UN on 1992 when in the resolution 47/133 was written the Declaration on the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, in which is established that disappearance can be considered as a crime against humanity. In 1992 the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance was made. Countries like Mexico agreed to create “mechanisms for prevention of enforced disappearance and to fight against impunity in which concerns the commission of this crime.”

<sup>4</sup> Social category with which Argentina named all people who were deprived from their liberty by the military dictatorship that this country lived between 1976 and 1983. The Argentinean State only recognizes the disappearance of 13 thousand people; however, the Association of “Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo” precise that the disappeared in this period were more than 30 thousand. See: <http://www.madres.org>

dictatorships in Latin America in countries like Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Guatemala, just by mentioning some of the cases that were taken to the Human Rights Commission of the UN.

Disappearance, as a crime, generates a series of obligations to the State in which the disappearance happened and is still happening, since this is the responsible authority with the obligation of generating politics and strategies to create and follow actions that propitiate: 1) strategies for the prevention of a crime such as disappearance; 2) the research of the crime to find the location of the direct and indirect responsible; 3) the ruling of sentences to punish those who commit this crime; and most relevant, 4) the localization, mainly while alive, of the disappeared person; if the localization wouldn't be given this way, the State also has the obligation to locate the body and/or the rests of the disappeared person to deliver them with dignity to their relatives<sup>5</sup>.

This series of legal conceptualizations must be accompanied by socio-political and socio-historical dissertations that place disappearances and the disappeared in contextual frameworks that allow us to understand why people, especially young people, are disappearing in Mexico, and what their whereabouts could be. Understanding the causes and motives for which people are disappearing would help to identify that they (disappearances) constitute a crime against humanity that is constantly denied by the State. This not only minimizes the existence of this crime but, at the same time, criminalizes the disappeared to make them responsible for their own disappearance. This generates the construction of stigma around disappearances that constantly violates the dignity and integrity of the disappeared, which undermines the possibility of social cohesion around the victims of this crime.

This criminal connotation of current disappearances, imposed by the Mexican State, is different from the somewhat generic definition of disappearances and disappearances in international human rights treaties and legislation, in which disappearance is thought of as part of the political-ideological actions developed by the victims. The name "detainee-disappeared" that appears in these treaties is not entirely tied to this other type of disappearance, which is committed by both the State and drug traffickers, as happened in Colombia and is currently manifested with force and terror in Mexico.

Thereon, Robledo (2016) thinks the disappearance and disappeared must not be detached from the social life that contains them, because it is in this reference frame that the actions their family make daily are attached. This process is expressed in their memory devices (Souza, 2018) and in the legal-political and political-social struggle they are carrying out to ensure recognition of the existence of the crime, the innocence of their disappeared and the inability of the State to confront this humanitarian crisis.

Gabriel Gatti (2017), one of the main theorists of Latin American's disappearances, created a conceptual genealogy to establish what is meant by disappearance and what is meant when a person is named as missing or disappeared. In his social-historical revision of both terms, based on Mahlke (2017), he establishes that the ideal type of disappeared does not only goes through a penal-juridical phase, but also by esthetic, psyche-clinical, social-political and social-historical criteria; Sugerencia It will be included on the media denomination.

The esthetic refers to universal representations that signify the disappearance, the disappeared and the pain that both facts generate in their families. The images of mothers carrying the pictures of their loved

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<sup>5</sup> In Mexico these series of obligations are stipulated on the General Victim's Law (GVL), and the General Law on Forced Disappearance of Persons and disappearance committed by individuals. Both Legislations were the result of the fight of victims of violence; the first case was led by the Caravana por la Paz con Justicia y Dignidad; and the second, by the Movimiento Nacional por Nuestros Desaparecidos en México.

missing ones on their chests is, perhaps, one of the most intense representations, as it is the search sheets with the caption “missing” that are posted in public places or distributed massively on digital social media (Franco, 2016).

The psyche-clinical refers to the psyche-social and psyche-emotional materialization, both propitiate the unfinished mourning, the rupture of the biographic process and fragmentation of everyday life that come after the disappearance. Here the focus is on the victims condition and the effects that: “persist on the survivors and their social environment, inscribing the pain in a dispute and power relationships field in which is possible to find forms of solidarity and practices of stigmatization and public rejection” (Robledo, 2017; p.21).

This process is intimately connected to the social-political space of articulation of the mobilization that produces not only public acknowledgement of the absence, but also of the absence of access to justice. Judith Butler (2016) has analyzed the distribution of the value of the loss or missing of lives in public spaces, whereof forms of social organization exist, where “the unsettling and democratizing character of the mourn” helps to visualize the tragedy (p.45). On this matter, the thousands of public manifestations of the families of the disappeared in Mexico constitute actions not just of public demand for justice but also of memory. They give public visibility to the existence of these disappearances, but also to the social-historical causes that provoked them. That is why the social-historical component is key to think about the causes linked to the commission of this crime in the past (even though this is still being manifested on the present).

The majority of the disappearances that were generated in Mexico between the 60’s and the 80’s had political-ideological components; which means that the people were mainly disappeared by the Mexican State because their political actions and thoughts constituted a risk to the political order. On the period known as “La Guerra Sucia” (The Filthy War), that covered the decades of the sixties and seventies in Mexico, there are 532 known cases of enforced disappearance (CNDH, 2001). From these, the authorities only confirmed their own participation in the actions that violated Human Rights of 275 people who victims of detention were, questioning and eventual enforced disappearance by elements of the Mexican State. Despite the official recognition, there does not exist any kind of sentence for these acts.

The current social-historical scenario that promotes the disappearance of 36 thousand 265 people in Mexico has been the presence of organized crime. We can think about disappearances as a terror strategy, but also consider the disappeared as victims of a violence that registers under the frame of a war against organized crime.

The disappeared, at least in the current Mexico, are the result of the commodification of the body and bodies. The utilitarian and expressive violences, as Reguillo (2011) states, combine all social and symbolic life. This creates utilitarian logics where “they kill just for killing” or “disappear just for disappearing” as long as the ends (mainly economic) allow it and justify it, because people are not seen as humans but as mere merchandise products that can be disposable or reusable as long as it profits the criminal activity.

This is feasible because in Mexico the nexus that unites the State with narco and necropolitics lies in the existence of a scenario of impunity where there is “a complex system of profit persecution that, however, remains hidden, encrypted or hidden as a residual element in the message delivered through the thousands and thousands of broken bodies that accumulate in the war on drugs” (Reguillo, 2011; p. 31).

Therefore, if we remove the disappearance and disappearance from the society that contains them, it will be very difficult to understand why this crime is committed in total impunity and, above all, to whom the disappeared are useful. If the existence of this crime is stripped of this contextual density, the humanitarian crisis that follows a disappearance will be missed, which, as Gatti (2017) maintains, is “a social

catastrophe” because it implies the destabilization not only of the social structure and fabric but also of human relations.

For now, these relationships are reconfigured through presence and absence, life and death, all through narratives where the present cannot be completely mixed with the past because the disappeared is a person “who is neither alive nor dead: he is disappeared”. This uncertainty generates unfinished grief in the victims but, at the same time, promotes social actions that have as their objective the search for the disappeared and the demand for justice.

For example, such as those actions taken by Mirna Nereyda Medina<sup>6</sup>, leader of the collective Las Rastreadoras de El Fuerte, a collective of relatives from the disappeared on the north of Sinaloa that make a search of ‘missing treasures’ twice a week. They name their disappeared “treasures” that the organized crime has buried on the hidden pits, because they identify that each one of them are the most precious thing a family has and, locating them, among all the barbarism, is similar to when someone finds a treasure under earth. She says:

“Now my life is searching. We, Las Rastreadoras, don’t have a life anymore: this is our life. We are not just a group, we are a family, and this family is missing a lot of treasures yet. I come to the searches to find treasures; I do it like that every Wednesday and Sunday because this is my life. I found Roberto, my son, but I’m still missing my partner’s treasures... My Roberto belongs to them and all their treasures also belong to me, and until we find everyone I won’t stop looking. Searching is now my life.”<sup>7</sup>

For instance, when we’re speaking about disappearances and positioning the disappeared, we can’t nor mustn’t obviate the context (esthetical, psico-clinical, social-political and social-historical) in which the person disappeared. Because there is where the analytic key resides to understand this tragic fact not just as a crime (which, is and will still be) or as a condition (the disappeared is and will keep being a violence victim). It must also be seen a terrible expression of a social moment in which the power of the state and/or the power of the narcomáquina establish exclusion criteria in which the necropolítica acts by making the lives of some people more tortuous and vulnerable; propitiating terror schemes that, like in the Mexican case, make the youths their main victims.

#### The quadruple disappearance

Earlier I specified that a victim of disappearance does not disappear one time, but four. The disappearances suffered by a victim of disappearance in Mexico are: physical, juridical-administrative, social-symbolic and mediatic.

The first disappearance, the physical one, is not only the main but also the most painful disappearance. In it the Human Right to freedom is disrupted by a criminal act that disappears a person with or without specific determined purposes, although always linked to the narcopoder and the narcomáquina that overlay

<sup>6</sup> Mirna Nereyda Medina is Roberto Corrales Medina’s mother, who disappeared on July 14th, 2014 on El Fuerte, Sinaloa, when armed men took him from his business. Mirna Nereyda found her son Roberto three years after his disappearance, on July 14th, 2017, on an area between the communities of Ocolome and Los Muros. She herself digged out her treasure from a hidden pit (Franco, Souza and Guerrero, 2017); despite of accomplishing her promise to find her son, Mirna is still leading the group Las Rastreadoras.

<sup>7</sup> Personal conversation made on November 19th, 2017, under the frame of a field research where Las Rastreadoras located the bodies of nine people on the periphery of the city of Los Mochis, Sinaloa.

any logic and security strategy of the State powers. This physical disappearance has left unfinished the life plan of 36 thousand 265 people; 26,938 men and 9,327 women. Every effort from the State should go into their search.

However, this does not happen because the disappeared in Mexico have to go through a strong bureaucratic system on the matter of justice procurement. Which leads to his second disappearance: the juridical-administrative. This disappearance occurs when the State seeks to minimize the impact of disappearances and their victims by decreasing crime statistics and reducing the number of disappeared persons to statistics or judicial records.

In this second phase of the disappearance, the most relevant factor is not the actions of search and justice but the configuration of a legal framework that allows the political administration of the tragedy. In Mexico, it is common practice for governments to hide their crime rates in order to generate a favorable public image of both the ruling party and the politician in charge of either the country, state or municipality.

In some cases, the public or media relevance of a disappearance can break the bureaucratic inertia but not the essence of its conception, because, when they give major priority to one case above others, the disappeared Human Rights are being violated regarding juridical equality and security. Since, in accordance to the law and the international agreements on matter of Human Rights, discrimination on the research and search of a victim of enforced disappearance must not exist.

The collectives of the disappeared's relatives in Jalisco denounced that after the disappearance of the 43 normalistas of Ayotzinapa, the authorities did not attend their cases because "the priority was to find the students"; after almost four years of their disappearance, the authorities have not found either the normalistas nor the thousand more disappeared they had to put on hold to be attended again by the authorities.

However, the juridical-administrative search of the disappeared in Mexico is being done at a desk; which means, the disappeared are searched through a bureaucratic process that prioritizes the exchange of collaboration applications rather than the search and field research. The only thing that happens is that many juridical files are generated through the disappearance of a person. Mexico is full of sheets that do not help at all the process of searching and justice:

"In more than two years, the research file of my son has more offices than reports of field research. The Public Ministry brags that the file is getting fatter (thicker) but nothing there is focused on finding Juan Carlos... there are times that my file doesn't even moves forward because they are all focused on the new cases... as if one disappeared was more important than others".<sup>8</sup>

The last testimony corresponds to the reflection Adriana made, mother of Juan Carlos Zaragoza Gao-na, 19 years old, who was disappeared outside his home by a group of armed men, on May 16th, 2015, in Zapopan, Jalisco. She belongs to the collective Por Amor A Ellxs, which –since 2016- takes actions of accompaniment and search of the disappeared in Jalisco. In several occasions, they have reported the juridical-administrative obstacles that exist on the search for their relatives. These include:

1. The excessive rotation of Public Ministries and police researches on the disappeared people research area of the Jalisco's Public Prosecutor's Office, which forces their cases to start all over again and again, since the new Prosecutor requires to read the file to know the case and, with this,

<sup>8</sup> Personal conversation with the author, February 23rd, 2018.

- start working on it.
2. Non access to the file. This blocks them of knowing if, indeed, the authority is searching for their relative or has done forensic acts to find the offender of the disappearance. Since they cannot check or have a copy of the file, it is impossible for them to contribute on the research that's made for finding their missing loved ones.
  3. Unworthy treatment by the personnel that leads the research. On the majority of cases, families had to suffer harassment and stalking of the authority that devoted the first hours of search on finding the disappeared responsible for their own disappearance, such as possibly linking of the family in the act.
  4. Generalization on the official declarations and/or communications about the disappearances in which, on a systematic manner, the disappeared is criminalized, linking them with the organized crime or the commission of criminal activities. They empathize on these acts, for which no proof is presented, as the main reason of the disappearance.

These two last points promote which has already been named as the social-symbolic disappearance. This third disappearance is the one that breeds when the dominant social narrative to talk about disappearance and the disappeared is attached to stigmatization. This derivates in two processes: 1) The criminalization of the victim of disappearance by holding him or her responsible for his or her own disappearance; and 2) The rupture of social bonds of the relatives of the missing ones with their primary and secondary communities, since the stigma propitiates and generates the creation of borders, rejection and abandonment of the families when they publicly confess they have a missing person.

Monica, also a member of *Por Amor a Ellxs*, is looking for her husband and son since September 19th, 2013, day in which both went missing in Guadalajara, Jalisco. She testifies that the stigmatization of the disappearance weights on her shoulders and her daughter's:

“I feel like stinky. We, families of the disappeared, are stinky, because in the moment you say you have a missing relative people run away quickly, they abandon you because they think that if they're near you, the same is going to happen to them, or they leave because they think you supported the wrong path your loved ones were taking... but the reality that not many people know is how painful it is to be in this situation... we are death in life but they just see the stigma that the fucking authority encourages when they mark that our disappeared were criminals or involved in drug trafficking”<sup>9</sup>

Gloria Inéz Peláez (2007), under the frame of the violence generated by drug trafficking in Colombia, states that the social stigma over the violence victims is something that is transferred directly to their families since these are “contaminated by the violent death of their relatives, their mourners carry the corresponding social healing, being segregated and feared by the contagion of their condition” (p. 92).

This “feeling stinky”, as Mónica narrates, is part of this social blindness that arises and is nourished not only by the stigma but also by the self-affirmation of goodness and immunity that makes us believe that this (disappearance) only happens to “people who are in bad steps”. This same blindness causes society to imagine the disappeared as people with few studies who live on the outskirts of the city where extreme poverty is driving them to join the narcos. Their disappearance as a result of this decision and, therefore, they are largely to blame for what happened to them.

This social-symbolic disappearance, in consequence, generates inclusion and exclusion mechanisms

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9 Personal conversation sustained on October 20th, 2016.

where some disappeared in comparison to others acquire more public, social and media relevance, since these are “more alike us”. In consequence, there’s no doubt that these were good people, which leads us many to share without hesitation their search sheets or convinces us to attend to public actions (marches, concentrations, memory acts, etcetera) because there is not suspicion that they should have never disappeared and, therefore, is the State’s obligation to locate them alive.

The social stigma about disappearances and the disappeared generates the invisibility of thousands of cases, which never reach public opinion because it is believed, as already stated, that the disappeared person is the main suspect and responsible for their disappearance. This stigma has a strong influence on the family tracing process because many of these accusations are generated by the State itself, which, since the complaint was filed, has raised suspicions about the victim and his or her relatives.

Often the journalistic and media field prioritizes the official discourses that place the disappeared as responsible for their disappearance. It is framed as a dispute between members of rival drug trafficking bands. The media forms a fourth disappearance, involving the establishment of communicational and informational logics where the stigma is presented as a category that homogenizes and depersonalizes the disappeared by giving them a “social identity” that does not match with their personal identity (as a victim). When the stigma operates this way, as Goffman (2006) states: “we stop seeing the person whole and common and reduce them to an infected and underestimated being” (p.12).

What do we imagine when we see the face of a missing person in communication media or in digital social media? What do communication media tell us about the reasons why the disappeared, like their families, become enforced victims? How are media representation of victims constructed? How do groups of relatives of the disappeared dispute these same representations when they fight for the restoration of the dignity of their disappeared person?

A media representation can be understood as a synthetic cultural formation that looks for placing and setting a type of particular meaning on a subject, fact or process that is named and/or visualized throughout communication media. It is a media production that does not only make the social representations visible, as “a conjunction of concepts, declarations and explanations created on everyday life and in the course of inter-individual communications” (Moscovici, 1981; p. 180); but they add symbolic and discursive elements with which they look for disputing and/or imposing a sense or meaning regarding what is represented/produced.

In contrast with social representations, but not far away from them, the media representations use the myths and belief systems of society to position determined meanings. In these, the reference and representation of matters are not the subjects nor the facts or processes themselves, but those proposed representations through which they are capable of modifying the symbolic forms (Thompson, 2006). Robledo (2015) states that “the historical relationships act as the real support of the existence and endurance of the stigma, which denies the biographies of the disappeared and frames them on a series of social marks and attributes different from their existence” (p.100).

Therefore, the media disappearance that the missing people and their families in Mexico suffer is a key element to understand the fights that the relatives of the disappeared collectives do to reverse the stigma of the disappeared. There currently exists a “representation crisis” that surrounds the nowadays humanitarian crisis of disappearances in Mexico:

“Under the frame of a war against drugs, a great part of the fight of the disappeared relatives, since the beginning of their presence in public territory on 2011, has consisted in the recovery of the honour of their loved ones and the questioning on the discourses that declare victims as collateral

damaged, as if they were participants or accomplices of the conflict. This fight is sustained in the purpose of overcoming the representation crisis through which the subject has been deprived of their identity to be consignee of general attributes that de-subjectify them. In this process, a double discourse of guilt and victimization is presented, in which the recognition of the disappeared is compromised” (Robledo, 2015; p.101).

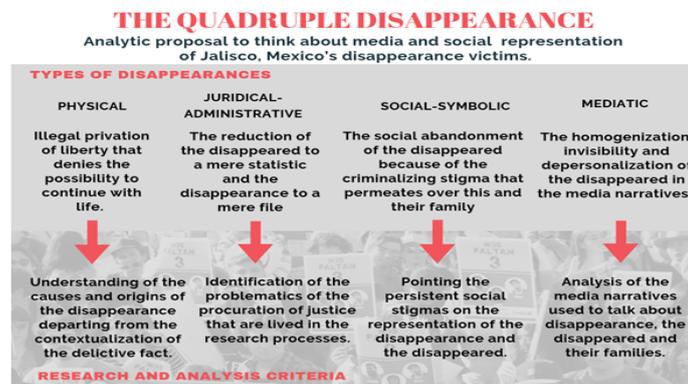
The effort of reconfiguring the governmental, social and media representation of their disappeared has been a vital task for them, because of the presence of a “criminalizing stigma” over the disappearances and the disappeared.

The fight against the double discourse that stigmatizes the disappeared and the ones who look for them constitutes one of the main lessons the Mexico’s relatives of the disappeared collectives have given us. All this effort should be recovered to generate actions that bring back the names, identity and life story to the disappeared. Because of that, especially for communication scientists it is important that seriously ask ourselves: 1) what type of media representation is generated by the media in Mexico around disappearance and the disappeared?; 2) How are media representations of disappearances and the disappeared valued, evaluated, approved or refuted by the families of these victims?; 3) What type of communicational inputs do families and collectives of Mexico’s disappeared generate to dispute the production of sense around the social stigma that comes from the governmental and media narratives?

One of the most powerful examples of these governmental narratives came when the government of Enrique Peña Nieto built a “historical truth” about the disappearance of the 43 normalistas de Ayotzinapa. For the Mexican government, the students were killed and cremated in the municipal dump of Cocula, Guerrero. The Interdisciplinary Group of Independent Experts of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, which investigated the disappearance at the request of the relatives, stated that there is no scientific evidence to support this version. To date, the families of the 43 normalistas are demanding their search in life, the State insists that they are dead.

This type of governmental narrative is repeated in many of the cases of disappearances in Mexico. Most of the groups of relatives of the disappeared have sought to counteract these “historical truths” through messages posted not only on their own websites but also on various digital social networks (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram or YouTube). From these platforms they broadcast their own press releases, positions and audiovisual productions (photographs, videos and live recordings) in order to account for themselves, regardless of the media, their actions, searches and demands for justice.

Graphic 1. The Quadruple Disappearance



Source: Own elaboration.

This analytic model is a proposal to think about the phases of disappearance that a victim of this crime has to live in Mexico. These are phases or processes that occur in an united way and that are always anchored to the vital space of life and fight that the families and/or the collectives undertake on the search of the disappeared.

This involves four phases of analysis that start from the criminal act to give an account of the difficult process that the families of the disappeared go through in order to demand that the authorities comply with their obligation to search for and justice. Because of that, there's an emphasis on the social-historical and social-cultural processes that are circumscribed to the construction of the social and media representation of the disappeared, since it is believed that in these phases of the disappearance of a person, stigmas are articulated, which is a key in their social-symbolical disappearance and in their media invisibility.

The model proposes that by analysing these four different disappearances that a disappeared and their family experience, we could account for the social and symbolic complexity surrounding the commission of this felony. Each one of these disappearances do not just constitute a part of the catastrophe (Gatti, 2017), but also a central element of mourning and social drama (Robledo, 2017) that implicates the disappearance of a person.<sup>10</sup>

#### Being young and disappeared in Jalisco, Mexico

In Mexico, officially, the existence of 34 thousand 268 disappeared people is recognized; from these, 15 thousand 445 are young people; which means that 42 percent of all disappeared persons in the country are around 14 to 29 years. From these disappeared youths, 10 thousand 104 are male and 5 thousand 341 female.

In Mexico, a whole generation born between 1990 and 2014 has turned into the main victims of disappearance; states as Tamaulipas (2,128 disappeared youths); Estado de México (1,763); Jalisco (1,403); Sinaloa (1,324); Nuevo León (1,231); Puebla (1,069) and Chihuahua (993), bring together the 63 percent of all youth's disappearance.<sup>11</sup>

Why are young people disappearing in Mexico? The reasons why young people disappear in Mexico depend on many different factors such as: 1) the zone where the disappearance happens; 2) the gender and age of the disappeared, 3) the authorities that rule on that state or municipality, but above all; 4) the organized criminal group that dominates the territory where a young man or woman was disappeared. This not just because young people are linked to drug trafficking, but because the delinquent activities of the organized crime are the ones that generate and propitiate the disappearances, on the majority of cases, with the involvement of the municipal, statewide, and federal authorities. Javier Salomón Aceves Gastélum (27 years old), Marco Francisco García Ávalos (20 years old) and Jesús Daniel Díaz García (20 years old), all of them students of the Universidad de Medios Audiovisuales (CAAV) went missing on March 19th, 2018, on Tonalá, Jalisco. Their disappearance generated a series of unprecedented protests in Jalisco, which fa-

<sup>10</sup> Robledo (2017) also proposes an analytic model to study the disappearance social drama; based on Victor Turner's theoretical proposals, and pro four phases: 1) The breaking of the regular; 2) the crisis; 3) Action on relief, and 4) Reintegration, what is needed in them is to understand the social behaviour under the process of drama that a disappearance implicates. Our model is not focused on the social drama per se, but on the construction process of the social and media representations of disappearance of the disappeared in each one of the four disappearances here proposed. Both models, however, point to understand how a disappearance is anchored to the victim's social lives modifying the roots of their biography and their social bonds.

<sup>11</sup> Jun 26st, 2018. Consult can be provided through internet on the website: <https://rnped.segob.gob.mx/>

cilitated that the Civil Society baptized again the Glorieta de Los Niños Héroes<sup>12</sup> (Roundabout of the Hero Children) as the Glorieta de las y los Desaparecidos de Jalisco (Roundabout of Jalisco's Disappeared). The profile of a disappeared person in Mexico is a youth between 14 and 19 years, middle or lower class, which regularly lives in the periphery of the urban zone.

The above is explained in an academic and journalistic research work that has been carried out during six years of the disappearance of people in Jalisco<sup>13</sup>. This state has been under the domain and terror of the *Cártel Jalisco Nueva Generación (CJNG)*<sup>14</sup> since 2007. This criminal group - which emerged, grew and consolidated in the midst of the "war on drugs" - has regional leaders who carry out not only the tasks of territorial control but also those of drug production and trafficking, mainly methamphetamine. This control includes the protection of the territory from rival groups such as relationships of collusion and corruption that are established with statewide and municipal authorities, and the commission of felonies like extortion, disappearance and homicide.

Throughout the 13 regions in which Jalisco is divided, the CJNG has managed to diversify its illicit activities so much that the labor force required to operate is growing every day. In this sense, young people are the main victims of disappearance because their labour force is employed by the cartel for forced labour such as: 1) slavery and the sex trade; 2) the planting of marijuana and/or poppy; 3) the chemical production of synthetic drugs; 4) drug decanting; 5) hit man labor (vigilant) inside and outside the domained territory; and, 6) illegal extraction of minerals, iron mainly, to be traded on the black market by the chemical precursors that the Cartel uses on the elaboration of meth.

Many of the above functions implicate the dehumanization of the body and dissolution of human dignity as if the disappeared people were just disposable bodies under the frame of a "death economy" (Mbembe, 2011). This refers to an economy in which people: "are not conceived as irreplaceable, inimitable and indivisible beings, but are reduced to a group of production forces easily replaceable" (p. 15).

Below we present some stories<sup>15</sup> that account and confirm the disappearance of youths in Jalisco for work and enforced slavery under the frame of a death economy promoted by practices such as *necropolítica* (necropolitics) and *capitalismo gore* (gore capitalism).

Juan, 19 years old, is original from the highland region of Jalisco. His everyday labors were divided between the family business and his studies until the day he went missing, together with other youths, on San Gabriel's municipality. He remained a few more than three years in huge poppy crops that the CJNG possesses on Jalisco's highlands until the day that a distraction on his captors allowed him to escape. He ran for three days; he was afraid of being discovered, because he knew that death waited for him; it also happened to other youths who fought for their freedom under those fields of enforced labor. Now their bodies

12 The "Niños Héroes" were a group of young soldiers who gave their lives after the invasion of the USA army on Mexico, on September 13th, 1847. On the same roundabout, on 2013, the first protest of Jalisco's relatives of the disappeared happened.

13 Jalisco is one of the most important states on terms of culture and economy. It is also a drug trafficking nest in Mexico, because here during the 80's, one of the first drug Cartels arose (*Cártel de Guadalajara*). Until April 30th, 2018, it is the second state in Mexico with most disappearances: 5 728. In an update released in March 2018, the Jalisco government accepted that there are 7117 missing persons in the state.

14 According to intelligence informs, the CJNG has presence on 22 of the 32 states of Mexico; it is also one of the main meth distributors in Europe and Asia.

15 In these stories the name of the youths were changed because of confidentiality and security. These personal interviews happened between 2015 and 2017, product of my journalistic-academic activity.

are in the secret pits that once Juan had to dig in order to bury those who, like him, were disappeared just to satisfy the production of the poppy for the criminal organization.

Another horror story was the one of Luis, 21 years old, who attended to a job appointment on Tala's municipality. The lack of opportunities and resources forced him to move to this municipality to obtain the job, which would allow him to keep studying. Everything looked good, the job was attractive, and they had granted it to him; the problem emerged when they told him before he returned home, they would take him to meet "the security company" that had just hired him; he accepted and there was where he went missing.

These jobs as security guard happened to be the forefront of the enforced training fields that the CJNG possesses on different spots in Jalisco; there, dozens of youths arrive to be trained on the use of weapons and, with that, become the first impact line that the Cartel uses in combat against enemy groups or State elements. The direct threat is: if they do not do as they're told, their families will be murdered.

Luis knew he had given them all the information to locate his family when he introduced himself in the "job interview". He lived more than two years being a hit man under the orders of the criminal organization; like him, many other young people were enforced to kill and disappear. Their lives and bodies were disposable to the cartel, as it conceives of these young people as:

"products of exchange that disturb and break the logics of the process of capital production, since they subvert the terms of this when they take out of the game the merchandise production phase, changing it for a merchandise literally incarnated on the body and human life, through predatory extreme violence techniques as kidnapping and murder by commission" (Valencia, 2016; p.25)

Luis' story is inscribed in the logic of death that the philosopher Valencia (2016) has constructed to explain that today Mexico is subsumed in a process of narcoempoderamiento (trafficking empowerment) that is configured through "dystopian actions and perverse self-affirmation achieved through violent practices" (p. 31). The narco-poder (trafficking power) as one of the main expressions of a capitalismo gore where "death has become the most profitable business" (p. 26).

Joaquín, 18 years old, reveals clearly this narcoempoderamiento, since he was a victim of the barbarism that rules the logic of the narco-poder. He was not disappeared to force him to do any labor; he went missing just to use his body as a message. Days after him and his partners, all workers of construction, went missing on the colony of San Juan de Ocotán in Zapopan. Their tortured bodies were found lifeless, on November 24th, 2011, under the sculpture artwork "Los Arcos del Milenio" (The millennial arcs), located on Guadalajara city. Their disappearance and death were reduced to the medium that Los Zetas (rivaling group that operates near the Mexican Gulf) used to send a message against the CJNG.

This "ghostly, untraceable and vague" violence that operates from what Reguillo (2011) has named the narcomáquina (trafficking machine), is a device of violence that gambles to be the dissolution of the humane through the constant exercise of fear and terror by organized crime. It is, disgracefully, one of the constants that haunts youths more in Jalisco than as in the rest of the country. Juan, Luis and Joaquín are victims of this narcomaquinaria (trafficking machinery) that makes hard to understand the real origin of this violence, since it is not possible to execute the narco-poder, as Reguillo and Valencia stand, without a link or collusion of institutional machinery.

Due the historic conditions, the narco-máquina blurs almost always the difference between criminal violence and political violence (Robledo, 2016). This narcomaquinaria and its necropolítica do not just define which bodies are disposable but also precise which could be reusable and under which conditions they might be, whether they are the medium of a terror message or to form part of the people trading network

that is operated by the diverse cartels in their territories.

Ana, 16 years old, disappeared because she was “very pretty”, that’s what her captors said to her. She spent some months in security houses from the CJNG so she could be later transferred to diverse brothels that the same Cartel operates. Ana worked four years before she could pay her freedom. In Mexico, 8 thousand 798 women are disappeared; 5,034 (57 percent) are youths that, like Ana, could be one of the 21 thousand women that every year are victims of human trafficking (HIP, 2017).

The stories here described could continue because what happens in Jalisco, takes part of the modus operandi of the majority criminal groups in Mexico. Besides, it is incorporated into the politics and transnational economic production and drug trafficking strategies, in which, as Valencia (2016) stands, states of exception are generated, in which the capitalismo gore –b side of the neoliberal movement- uses violence as the main power and terror.

This is why disappearance is not just a crime that is used as a terror strategy but also as a modern slavery form where youths are the main victims, whether is for their labor strength or their moldable, useful and reusable capacity on the infinity of crimes the drug trafficking cartels control inside and outside Mexico.

### 3.- METODOLOGY, SAMPLE PERIOD AND DATA USED

#### Design

This article was made through a documentary and contextual analysis of the political and media speeches that have been developed about the disappearances that have occurred in Mexico between 2006 and 2018, This involved the revision of journalistic notes in local newspapers<sup>16</sup>; the collection of testimonies of relatives of missing persons and victims of disappearance who escaped from places where they were deprived of their liberty; as well as government programs and actions that have been created to face the commission of this crime.

Likewise, under a qualitative approach (Andara & Mertz, 2015), various testimonies were collected to understand what implies a disappearance from the voice, thought and meaning of those who have been victims of this crime.

For this, various theoretical perspectives were used that allowed, through contextual analysis, to outline the predominant profile of the victims of disappearance in Mexico and, at the same time, offer a possible answer as to why it is that the country disappears mainly young people and what they are used for.

#### Instruments

This article used several qualitative interviews that this author personally conducted with four young people (Juan, Luis, Joaquín and Ana), who managed to survive a disappearance in Jalisco, as well as with Mirna Nereyda Medina, leader of the Las Rastreadoras collective of El Fuerte; All these interviews conducted in person gave empirical material for the conformation of the theoretical-analytical bet called: The fourfold disappearance of people in Mexico.

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<sup>16</sup> An analysis of the newspapers El Informador, El Occidental and NTR Guadalajara was carried out; the first two from January 1, 2006 to December 31, 2018; as NTR from January 1, 2012 to December 31, 2018.

## Process

The analysis of political and media discourses on disappearances allowed us to establish a contextual panorama (How many missing persons are there in Mexico and what are their characteristics?). But also in analytical terms; that is, he delved into pointing out the social, political and economic causes that affect the disappearance of young people in Mexico, which could focus more through the qualitative analysis that was carried out of the testimonies of the victims of disappearance, specifically, of those who managed to survive this crime.

In total, four young survivors of disappearance were interviewed and five relatives of disappeared persons articulated by the groups *Por Amor A Ellxs* and *Las Rastreadoras de El Fuerte*.

## 4.- CONCLUSIONES

This text tried to concretize an analytic framework in order to analyze disappearance and the disappeared through a social life that contains them and anchors them to a specific societal context. It is sustained that in Mexico they disappear four times. In the societal context in which disappearances happen, they should be framed as part of an aggravating humanitarian crisis propitiated by an institutional failure, where neither human will nor politicizes exist to fix this problem that daily violates the Human Rights of the disappeared and their families.

The diverse manifestation of political and criminal violence that nowadays coexist in Mexico and is being operated through the *narcomáquina*, make evident the necessity to build, transdisciplinarity, theoretical-analytic models that allow the comprehension of the terrible moment we're living in. A moment that must be analyzed not only through the *narcoempoderamiento* with which Sayak Valencia (2016) explains the operation of the *capitalismo gore*, but also through the presence and civilian fight that generates actions "against the machine" in the public space.

This, following the theoretical proposal of Reguillo (2011), allowed us to deploy a series of actions with which we have accomplished "resistance, visibility, and subtraction of power from the *narcomáquina*", but also to the institutional machinery that systematically denies the crisis we endure. For this reason, we must also report on the empowerment that the families of the disappeared have generated as a reaction, response and counter-response to the violence of which they are victims. The path is long but the fight for the respect of Human Rights of every disappeared (and victims of violence in general) deserve that our actions against the machine, against the official and media narratives keep growing in form and sense. The aggravating crisis of Human Rights in Mexico forces us to leave "fragility, intermittency and non-expression" to give way to personal and collective actions capable of reversing the multiple forms of violence that constrain us, even the possibility of living a full democracy (Bolaños, 2016).

Hence, one of the conclusions of this article is to propose the holistic analysis of disappearances in Mexico through the theoretical-analytical proposal that we have termed here "the fourfold disappearance", which we consider could provide a reference framework closer to the terrible reality that, unfortunately, we live in Mexico around the disappearance of people.

The challenge is thinking that the disappearances, like that, in plural, concern us because in them lies a "I, missing" that is faced with two options: indolence or hope. The first one separates us from the disappeared and increases the stigma that exists among them, but the second hangs an humanitarian bridge between both, which makes possible the understanding of Human Rights as a collective act and not just as an individual act.

¡Vivos se los llevaron, Vivos los queremos! (They took them alive! We want them alive!).

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