

Disappearance

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Disappearance: when something that was visible and tangible ceases to be within the reach of the human eye's perception. To disappear, implies that a person is placed in the realm of non-existence, of emptiness, of countless doubts, which often remain unanswered.

Disappear, disappearance, disappeared; words that are part of everyday language, both in colloquial conversations, newscasts, or in social networks. There are countless missing persons, and even worse, collectives formed by relatives, which are growing every day.

The many families who do not have a missing person, often decide not to get involved in the issue, simply passing by the many posters with images of missing people. There is a great deal of apathy, and, often, a participation in re-victimization. Perhaps it is part of the collective fear, or perhaps it is the effect of not wanting to see what we know exists inside.

Apathy or not, we can see the empty streets, the same corners where boys and girls used to talk without the vigilance of their families, where boys and girls used to play football and ride their bicycles for several blocks, activities unthinkable today. How will these new generations behave when they reach adulthood? There is no answer yet, time will tell. Meanwhile, anthropology, sociology and psychology will be studying these paradigm shifts in society.

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These changes in behavioral patterns have an impact on social relations, and the increase in the number of missing persons has had a lot to do with the fact that children and young people have few freedoms compared to the generations that preceded them.

Talking about the disappearance of people connects us with the pain and helplessness of entire families around the globe. It introduces us to the lack of protection that we experience in our daily lives, since the State and its institutions do not provide security, and unfortunately, many times, public officials are participants in - or accomplices of - criminal groups.

Institutional actions have left the collectives and the victims themselves adrift. There are agreements and international treaties in which Nation-States, such as Mexico, have committed to eradicating various types of violence, to promoting human rights, and to ensuring that citizens have real access to a life free of violence.

Among these commitments, the State institutions should provide, through the police forces, preventive actions to avoid kidnappings, such as raids, policing of social networks, as well as diffusion of patterns and tactics employed by organized crime.

When a person is kidnapped, the families make an administrative and bureaucratic pilgrimage. There are many testimonies that illustrate, with great pain, the re-victimization to which these families are subjected, thus becoming victims of "institutional violence".

When a loved one goes missing, the families have not had, generally, any previous contact with this bureaucracy. In this respect, the collectives do extraordinary work, since they provide emotional, and sometimes legal and psychological accompaniment, as well as the personal experience of all the people who make up these groups. I would like to add that the collectives generate are almost entirely self-

funded. The figure of the searcher is generally feminine, since it is generally the mothers who lead this search. This does not mean that there are no men, but their participation takes place behind the women. In Argentina, they are the Mothers and Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo, to mention an example. Here in Mexico, Mother's Day has become a day to reflect and demand from the institutions, a search for the missing persons. On the march of May 10th, a day emblematic in our country for being Mothers' Day, every year (except for the years of pandemic) more families, more journalists, more civil society organizations, and more collectives become visible. May 10th is not a celebration; it is a day of struggle and protest.

The march has brought together families with victims of trafficking, femicide, involuntary disappearance, missing persons and forced disappearance. Each concept is treated differently; it is not the same to file a complaint for "unlocated person", whose location is unknown and whose absence is not related to a probable crime. On the other hand, victims of disappearance, catalogued as "missing persons", whose whereabouts are unknown, but whose absence is related to a crime. This is one of the reasons for which many authorities revictimize the victim at the time of the complaint, by, for example, assuming that the girl ran away with her boyfriend, or that the boy had problems with his parents. By placing these people as unlocated persons, the authorities "search", but do not investigate a crime.

In our country, as in many others, we have suffered from State violence. Hence, forced disappearances are those committed by the State, military and police forces. In Mexico thousands and thousands of people have been victims of this type of disappearance for many decades. Specifically, during the 1970's, with the so-called "Dirty War". For the Eureka collective, the word War is not valid in this sense, since it does not refer to two sides with the same conditions; on the contrary, Eureka has called it "State Terrorism"

because of the unilateral nature of the attacks. But in the case of visualizing this period of our history as a Dirty War, the Mexican State and its militia did not adhere to the Geneva Conventions, signed in 1949, which establishes protection for victims in armed conflicts, including the civilian population.

While many people have been victims of State terrorism, in more recent times the Ayotzinapa case had a worldwide impact, despite it remaining unresolved.

Ayotzinapa invites us to reflect on that search, the search for deceased persons, the search for bodies. Today, Mexico is considered to have a "forensic crisis", since there are more bodies frozen or waiting to be unearthed in clandestine graves. Where are they? Many of them are there, and again the collectives, without the knowledge of a physical or forensic anthropologist, go out to learn to search, find, give notice and many times, those bodies, which could speak in a verbal autopsy and be reunited with their families, are still waiting to be found. In the forensic field, this phenomenon has received the name of "The third disappearance", the first one being the one that generated the absence; the second, when the bodies are buried in clandestine graves; and the third, refers to the State itself. In Mexico, unfortunately, a national genetic data bank is urgently needed to return the bodies of loved ones to their families. Only in official data, which constitute the tip of the iceberg and not the real numbers, but which serve to give us an idea of the magnitude of the problem, the year 2022 closed with more than 109,000 missing and unaccounted for persons, and in January 2023, the number of missing and unaccounted for persons was 586.

We need many actions and public policies, as well as more political will and a more empathetic citizenship towards these issues.

NEVER AGAIN has become a utopian phrase. But that does not mean that we should turn our faces away from this reality.

