



# THE DISAPPEARANCE OF 43 TEACHER-TRAINEES IN MEXICO: AN APPROACH TO CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS IN THE PRESS<sup>1</sup>

## LA DESAPARICIÓN DE LOS 43 NORMALISTAS EN MÉXICO: UNA APROXIMACIÓN AL ANÁLISIS CRÍTICO DEL DISCURSO EN LA PRENSA

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### Abstract

This article sets out a critical analysis of the press's discourse in covering up the disappearance of forty-three young students in Guerrero (Mexico) in September 2014. For this matter, a corpus of 2,107 journalistic documents, obtained through a three-month follow-up of the *Reforma* and *La Jornada* journals, was examined with the purpose of identifying the discursive strategies used by the press to report this event using the analysis of the lexical frequency and occurrence of noun phrases. Namely, four discursive strategies were identified: denial and neutralization were used to cover up the State's responsibility in the violent events, and

<sup>1</sup> Retrieved from the research study *Violencias y violaciones a Derechos Humanos en el marco de la desaparición forzada de personas en México: marcas simbólicas y materiales del agravio y formas de resistencia de las víctimas en torno al reclamo de derecho* (Violence and Human Rights Violations within the Scope of the Forced Disappearance of People in Mexico: Symbolic Marks and Tort Materials, and Forms of Resistance from the Victims regarding the demand for rights) by Grupo de Investigaciones en Antropología Social y Forense (GIASF) (Social and Forensic Anthropology Research Group), and Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social (CIESAS) (Center for Research and Higher Studies in Social Anthropology). Starting date: January, 2016. Completion: December, 2017. And from the project *La construcción discursiva en la prensa de los actores sociales en la desaparición de los 43 normalistas en Ayotzinapa* (Press' Discursive Construction of Social Agents regarding the Disappearance of the 43 Teaching-Trainees in Ayotzinapa) (Mexico), financed by the Programa para el Desarrollo Profesional Docente, para el Tipo Superior (PRODEP) (Program for Professional Teacher Development, for the Superior Type), code 40713554: PTC-333, made by Grupo de Investigación en Análisis del Discurso (GIADI) (Research on Speech Analysis Group). Translated with support by Center for Research and Higher Education in Social Anthropology (CIESAS), translator: Adriana Yazmín González Ramírez. Edited and reviewed by Lic. Tania Stephanie Castañeda Alpizar.

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historization and validation were used as part of the dissenting discourse. All these strategies are targeted towards the conflict among the lexical fields which give sense to the forced disappearance and the violation of human rights. © Revista Colombiana de Ciencias Sociales.

### **Keywords:**

Human Rights; Discourse; Press; Violence.

### **Resumen**

En este artículo se propone un análisis crítico del discurso de la prensa en el cubrimiento de la desaparición de cuarenta y tres jóvenes estudiantes en Guerrero (México) en septiembre de 2014. Para ello se explora un corpus de 2.107 documentos periodísticos, obtenido en tres meses de seguimiento a los diarios *Reforma* y *La Jornada*, con el objetivo de identificar las estrategias discursivas utilizadas en la prensa para reportar este suceso, a partir del análisis de la frecuencia léxica y la ocurrencia de frases nominales. En concreto se identifican cuatro estrategias discursivas: la negación y la neutralización, empleadas para ocultar la responsabilidad del Estado en los actos violentos; y la historización y la acreditación, como parte del discurso disidente. Todas estas estrategias están orientadas a la disputa de los campos léxicos que dan sentido a la desaparición forzada y a la violación de los derechos humanos. © Revista Colombiana de Ciencias Sociales.

### **Palabras clave:**

Derechos humanos; Discurso; Prensa; Violencia.

## INTRODUCTION

Studies on discourse analysis of the media have demonstrated that the press focuses on events that are considered relevant to a social group, aside from transmitting a series of opinions and values related to the events and interests of those conveying them. (Van Dijk, 1990). Furthermore, it has been pointed out that the way in which events are linguistically reported reflects and influences the cognitive representation made by the members of a community. Thus, the journalistic discourse can potentially become a means of action for the dominant ideologies and contribute to the inclusion of these ideologies in social cognition.

While we support this idea, we also prove that the press is an ideological dispute field in which the understanding of violent events is at stake. The main goal of this first data review is to acknowledge the discursive strategies used by the National Mexican Press to name the facts and the State's responsibility in reporting the disappearance of Ayotzinapa's 43 students.<sup>2</sup> The analysis falls within the critical discourse analysis (CDA) framework, which makes it possible to identify the linguistic strategies used in the discourses to maintain social control through the abuse of power or entitlement, and, occasionally, counteract them (Van Dijk, 2009; Fairclough, & Fairclough, 2012).

The set of documents that were analyzed come from two nationwide journals, *Reforma* and *La Jornada*. A total of 2,107 journalistic documents were revised, 796 of which belong to *Reforma*, and 1,311 of which belong to *La Jornada*, over a three-month period since the first release on the disappearance of the teacher-trainees, which was published on September 27, 2014. The selection of the temporary sample has the purpose of highlighting the progressive construction of the discourse regarding the case in the months following its occurrence. While it is a topic that really stood out in the national and international press over several months, and even years (with a decreasing trend after the first year), the goal of this analysis is limited to the first reactions associated with the event.

To study the corpus, the *Atlas Ti* (7<sup>th</sup> version) qualitative analysis program was used. This program made it possible to choose the most-frequently-used lexical categories to refer to the agents and the facts. Two opposing discursive trends are highlighted in the analysis; on the one hand, the State's discourse, which promotes the denial and neutralization of the facts, and, on the other hand, the social resistance discourse, which is reflected in the historicity of the disappearance phenomenon in Mexico, and the social validation of the people demanding the clarification of the crimes that took place.

<sup>2</sup> This communication is an analysis that is part of a wider project whose goal is the acknowledgement of the discursive strategies in favor of power and the tampering of news discourse in displaying the social agents involved in the disappearance, along with the facts.

## The Context: Ayotzinapa within The “War against Drugs” Framework: Reality and Discourse

On September 26, 2014, in the town of Iguala, State of Guerrero, 43 young students from the “Normal Superior” (Teaching Training College) Raúl Isidro Burgo<sup>3</sup> were intercepted by local police officers who started shooting the bus on which they were travelling to a public demonstration. After fiercely and repeatedly shooting them —killing three students and other citizens— the young students were transferred by a light truck to the town of Cocula, where they disappeared after being handed over to the armed group “Guerreros Unidos” (United Warriors)<sup>4</sup>. Among this series of events, there are still unexplained facts and agents that do not seem to have a clear participation, like the Army<sup>5</sup> and Iguala Guerrero’s Mayor, José Luis Abarca, whose direct accountability has been pointed out by several witnesses.<sup>6</sup>

The official version, presented on November 14 by Attorney General José Murillo Karam, who described it as “the historical truth of the facts”, states that the young students were burned out in a garbage dump on the outskirts of Cocula and their ashes were thrown into the river. Regarding this version, the parents of the missing students have shown their dissent demanding the truth, in accordance with civil organizations, independent expert groups, and the “Comisión Interamericana de Derechos Humanos” (Inter-American Commission of Human Rights), which carried out special protection work for the victims through the GIEI: “Grupo Interdisciplinario de Expertas y Expertos Independientes” (Interdisciplinary Group of Independent Experts), as requested by the Comisión Interamericana de Derechos Humanos (CIDH), to contribute to the investigation of the facts.

The disappearance of Ayotzinapa’s young students served as a launching point for the acknowledgement of a systematic and widespread problem that the victims had reported at least since 2011, as part of the outcome of the so-called “War against Drugs”, promoted in the presidential term of Felipe Calderón Hinojosa in 2006, and followed by the current president of Mexico, Enrique Peña Nieto, for the 2012-2018 term.

In the Iguala events, a series of complex conditions fused together: a criminal group that controlled the territory of several municipalities; civil authorities that were part of the criminal organization’s structure; local police officers who were actually criminals under the command

<sup>3</sup> Rural teaching training schools were conceived as a part of an educational overcrowding introduced since the 1920s. The Ayotzinapa Normal school was the study home of Lucio Cabañas and Genaro Vázquez Rojas, leaders of important guerrilla movements.

<sup>4</sup> Guerreros Unidos is a criminal organization founded in 2008 after the breakup of the “Cartel de los Beltrán Leyva”, following the death of their leader. This organization mainly operates in the states of Guerrero and Morelos, devoting itself to extortion, kidnapping and drug trafficking. For more information about this group, and its involvement in the disappearance of the teacher-trainees see Hernández (2016).

<sup>5</sup> The parents of the missing students reported through their lawyer that the Army would have started the attack against the students, who could be deprived of their liberty in the 27 Infantry Battalion (“Los militares...”, 2015).

<sup>6</sup> The General Mexican Republic Attorney’s Office pointed out that Iguala, Guerrero’s mayor, José Luis Abarca, and his wife, María de los Ángeles Pineda, would have been the intellectual authors of the disappearance of the young students, and, moreover, it demonstrated their role as active members of the United Warriors Organization since many years ago. The couple has been arrested for organized crime, and for the crimes that took place in Ayotzinapa (Castillo García, 2014b).

of other offenders; and federal armed forces that participated in a still undefined way during the commitment of the crimes (Hernández, 2016). In spite of the fact that in the Ayotzinapa case—with the help of witnesses and reports presented by independent agencies—it was possible to point out the direct participation of state and city police officers in handing over the young students to the Guerreros Unidos group, the facts are still unclear. The liable parties have been convicted for aggravated kidnapping and qualified homicide, without being able to establish if “the 43 students case is a disappearance strategy enforced as a formal practice before groups that are considered potentially disruptive, or the criminal act of a small group within the political/military system” (Cacho, 2015).

## The Social Problem: Disappearance as a Breach, and its Social Representation

The disappearance of people is a catastrophic practice<sup>7</sup> that places the human condition in an extreme situation (Gatti, 2011) and demands the reassessment of the relationships between the representation and the facts. The missing person is in a liminal state (Turner, 1974) between life and death, against which societies develop meaning fields and practices for interpretation, disclosure, and ritualization, in order to give sense to this extreme situation (Blair, 2004) and restore the relationship between facts and words (Gatti, 2012).

It is important to understand that this social field is built around the discourse, and, therefore, around power conflicts and relationships that limit the recognition of the subjects and facts. Language has the ability to “de-realize” by building discursive strategies to leave out certain aspects of reality and highlight others: “along with the violent experience, a framework to think about it arises –a framework that works both for preventing certain types of questions and historical analyses, and for proving a moral justification for revenge” (Butler, 2006, p. 28). It is the discursive framework in which meanings are woven.

However, as Butler (2009) states, this meaning and recognition frameworks are not irreversible structures: “the framework detaches from itself in order to reproduce itself, and its reproduction becomes the place where a significant political breach is possible.” (Butler, 2009, p.44). It is right in these interstices where political resistance pervades the recognition frameworks and makes

<sup>7</sup> Gatti (2011) makes a distinction between trauma, event, and catastrophe. For the author, trauma is a deep, but temporary, destabilization; event (recalling Veena Das' proposal) is a deep and intense destabilization which does not last long, while catastrophe is stable instability: the permanent mismatch between things and words, turned into structure in such mismatch.

the existence of denied lives and the pinpointing of claims a public debate, demanding the right to be incorporated in society as legitimate lives, and in the discourse as part of the subjects' representation and acknowledgement field.<sup>8</sup>

## The Discursive Problem: Discourse, Power and Social Representation

Ideally, the main quality of the discourse promoted by the press is delivering information. This statement, based on its informative nature, leads, in many cases, to not questioning the truthfulness and objectivity of published content, in such a way that, although the social groups are aware that the press itself is a business, the information published by the press is usually considered to be at the service of the community and objective (Salgado Andrade, 2001). The discourses used by the press show the political or financial set of interests of the owners, and, thus, of the media investors, i.e. the hegemonic groups. These groups build discourses that serve their interests and allow them to maintain the stability of the systems created by them. The journalistic discourse turns out to be a means and an end per se, establishing itself as a social interaction tool for the reproduction of the dominant group's ideologies<sup>9</sup> and as an action mechanism to create ways of interpreting reality. This set of subjectivities transmitted through the journalistic discourse needs to be unveiled to recognize both the interaction modes and the social problems that result from power and injustice.

For Van Dijk (2014), power lies in having control over the discourses that affect the way society interprets the events, the agents involved, and their actions, which ultimately pose mental representations. By means of tampering, discourses promoting inequality, impunity, and fear are built and shaped as a knowledge and ideology network in the subjects' minds. The types of discursive control can be traced through the use of language or linguistic evidence (Fairclough, & Fairclough, 2012); for example, at the lexical-semantic, syntactic, and pragmatic levels.

<sup>8</sup> The way in which the Argentinian press addresses the disappearance is an example of how this happens. A series of discursive operations expel and deny the subjects of the hegemonic narrative sustained by the contemporary political-military power. But this discourse is disputed by the families and Human Rights organizations that promote the subject's recognition, contributing to the construction of the collective label "missing" (Escudero Chauvel, 2001).

<sup>9</sup> As shown below, the press allows the existence of other discourses that are opposed to the dominant discourses and that contribute to the regulation of power relationships without losing the elite's privileges.

## METHODOLOGY

### The Corpus

A printed format was chosen for the corpus selection due to its importance as a conventional communication means and its historical document nature.<sup>10</sup> On the one hand, *La Jornada* newspaper was chosen. This journal is a political and critical journal created in Mexico City in 1984 through the joint effort of journalists, intellectuals, scholars, politicians, and writers that were unhappy with the monopoly of the information media and control mechanisms of the press held by the political power of the time (Rodríguez Araújo, 2015). As a counterpoint, we chose the *Reforma* journal, which belongs to “Grupo Reforma” (Reforma Group). It is linked to the Junco de la Vega family belonging to the newspaper, magazine, publishing house and telephone service business since 1930 up until now. Both newspapers are well-known in Mexico for their wide distribution and disclosure. However, they differ in the political trend each of them holds; *Reforma* has a centralistic approach and *La Jornada* has a left-wing approach. (Arce Barceló, 2011).

The gathering of data started on September 27, 2014 and ended on November 27, 2014 (three months after news coverage on the events started). The newspapers were fully reviewed and the texts that had as a main topic Ayotzinapa events were drawn from there. They were then scanned and filed. The documents that were retrieved include texts from front pages, publishing houses, opinion columns, and journalistic notes, which were distributed in a moment in time and by each one of the journals as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1.**

*Distribution of the corpus’s journalistic texts*

Journal / Month	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Total
La Jornada	20	601	690	1,311
Reforma	19	456	321	796
Total	39	1.057	1011	2,107

Source: Personally prepared, 2015.

The distribution of the corpus’ texts shows an introductory piece of information: the substantial difference between the number of spaces dedicated to the topic by each of the journals. *La Jornada* published approximately twice as many texts on the Ayotzinapa case, compared to the amount

<sup>10</sup> The printed format’s selection addresses the interest in the development of further studies that include the graphical and structural aspects of the journal, which are not taken into account in this study.

of texts *Reforma* published over the same period of time. In the first two months following the event, the number of texts remains similar between both journals, but over time, it has a variation tendency. In November, *La Jornada* published twice as many texts on the topic as *Reforma*.

## Analytical Path

To begin the journal analysis, five journalistic texts from the first five days of each month were randomly selected in order to build a temporary representative sample that would allow us to identify changes and continuities over the first two months. The purpose was to include the first reports about the events, the research's course, and the allocation of responsibilities. Specifically, two opinion texts, two articles, and one front page, which addressed the victims, the perpetrators, and the events, were chosen in order to produce a list of keywords to identify them. These three categories made it possible to define the way in which the relationships between the participants and their actions are represented. Plus, from the CDA perspective, they contribute to the recognition of the interaction strategies among the agents in the construction of a polarized discourse that favors the political power (Van Dijk, 2006), or the presence of dissident discourses.

The Ayotzinapa hermeneutical unit was then created in the program Atlas Ti. All of the documents were kept in PDF format and classified in six groups, three for each publication journal. The words or denominations identified were entered in the program as codes and they were classified in three groups according to the agents and events: facts (103 codes), victims (66 codes), and victimizers (53 codes).<sup>11</sup> Using the *autocoding* tool, the program was commanded to identify each of the codes as exact words in all the primary document groups. A report (*output*) of the frequencies (grounds) of each code was then requested in an Excel table format by month and journal. Once the higher and lower-frequency codes in each group were identified, those that were more relevant to the purpose of the research were selected. Then, using the *autocoding* tool, the program was asked to provide full sentences for each of the codes in all the primary documents in order to carry out an analysis of the words in their enunciative context.

<sup>11</sup> We chose these categories with the purpose of understanding the social representation of the agents that make up the traditional criminal dyad: victims and victimizers, with the understanding that their identity is the result of a building process that is also present in the discourse of the press. On the other hand, we are interested in learning the forms that the criminal events enunciation attains, knowing that the words used to name it have significant political strength, since they remark different degrees of liability and severity. In this article, we make reference solely to the facts.



## RESULTS

### What happened in Ayotzinapa? The Facts

The review of the corpus, with the help of the Atlas Ti program, provided a list of keywords that refer to two aspects of what happened (what we call “the facts”) in Ayotzinapa on September 26: (1) the violent acts, and (2) the context’s conditions. Regarding the violent acts, words related to the actions taken against the students (*homicide, aggravated kidnapping, deprivation of life, among others*) were identified, emphasizing the difference among crimes, human rights violations, and plain language related to the events without using a formal legal language (*rave, incident, shooting, abduction and murder*). Regarding the context of the event, words referring to their interpretation, as well as the social and political conditions that begin to make up the narrative of the event (*violence, corruption, impunity, secret pits*) were found. Overall, these findings make it possible to see that discourse plays several roles in terms of the conflict that are related to the meaning of the facts and the agents’ participation. On the one hand there is a tendency to naturalize the actions taken by the State through *denial*<sup>12</sup>, or the State’s failure to allocate political liability for the assault on the students, inasmuch as it is built as part of law enforcement’s defense against the assault on the students, and neutralization as a way to revoke or reduce the effects of the State’s actions.

On the other hand, in the journalistic field we have the dissident voices that fight for room in the media as a result of national and international peer pressure, which is displayed through the *historization* shown in the location where the event took place as part of a chain of systemic violence that has been present in Mexico over the last years, and through *validation*, such as the testimonials from victims, opinion makers, and activists, which legitimize the State’s call regarding the victims’ claims against the assault and its intention to silence them.

### Denial

The first news on the topic and the official positions posed by the press around the events exemplify a denial discourse, which aims to deliberately disguise and obscure reality (Pano Alamán, 2011). The news published by *La Jornada* the day following the events is titled “Muerto, un alumno de Ayotzinapa” (“One student from Ayotzinapa dead”). Its main source is Iguala’s Mayor, who states that “there were no casualties, and the teaching-trainees’ presence was an

<sup>12</sup> The strategies described are coined by the authors from news material.

incitement for the action led at 8 p.m. by his wife María de los Ángeles Pineda Villa” (“Muerto, un alumno...”, 2014). On the other hand, *Reforma* describes the event as a “shooting” in which the students and a group of football players were riddled: “Desatan violencia: matan a 6 en Iguala” (Violence unleashed: 6 killed in Iguala) (Desatan violencia..., September 28, 2014). The news quotes the words of the Attorney General of Guerrero, who explains the event as a result of the students’ incitement: “District Attorney Iñaki Blanco reported in a press conference that, on Friday at 9:30 p.m., a group of teacher-trainees seized three buses from the bus station for the purpose of taking them to their educational institution” (“Desatan violencia...”, 2014). From this perspective, the students are presented as the parties responsible for triggering the violent episodes, and the assault they underwent is concealed. According to Van Dijk (2009, p. 363), blaming the victim is one of the ways in which the dominant group discursively influences the mental models of the receiving party, i.e. reallocating liability for the event in support of their personal interests. The first narratives of the event match in suggesting an attack committed by police officers and “armed men”, in response to the “seizure” of the buses by the students. Later on, on October 5, *La Jornada* gives another official explanation which states that the assault was a result of the “trouble caused by the bus seizures and financial damage to businesses involved in money laundering from drug trafficking” (Castillo García, 2014a).

The denial strategy is subsequently disputed by the dissident voices that begin clarifying the facts. However, as months go by, political power insists on stating “the historical truth” in which the liability of federal authorities is not specified, and a biased version about the possible destiny of the students is sustained (“Palabras del procurador...”, 2014) (Attorney’s Words...), an interpretation which, after a few months, begins to also be debated by the scientific discourse and the intervention of international organizations.<sup>13</sup>

## Neutralization

The discourse found in the corpus features ways of diminishing or revoking the effect of the State’s crimes using lexical fields that link the events to criminal violence, as shown on Table 2. Neutralization, as Arroyo Juárez (2002) states, happens when the official version of the events sustaining that “it did not happen” is challenged by reality:

When the media, human rights organizations, and victims demonstrate that it is actually happening (“here lie the graves, see the pictures, here are the autopsy reports”) it has to be said that what happened was not what it looks like but rather something completely different (Arroyo Juárez, 2002, p. 481).

<sup>13</sup> According to the official version, the students were burned down to ashes in Cocula’s garbage dump. This statement has been condemned by different independent reports that describe it as fake.

**Table 2.**

*Words that describe the violent acts*

Keywords	La Jornada				Reforma				Total
	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Total LJ	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Total R	
Kidnapping	2	46	49	97	2	49	22	73	170
Homicide	9	57	77	143	5	37	7	49	192
Assault	25	112	82	219	7	33	18	58	277
Offense	4	89	161	254	3	45	16	64	318
Murder	12	199	90	301	0	58	17	75	376

Source: Personally prepared, 2015

The criminal violence discourse –which overlooks the State’s liability– overlaps the human rights narrative, which ends up being marginalized in spite of the power of the social protest and the widespread outrage. In this sense, it is interesting to see that the noun phrase (NP) “forced disappearance”<sup>14</sup> –which directly refers to a crime committed by state officers– does not appear among the 10 most frequent ways to name the events, taking the 11th position, just below torture, kidnapping, homicide, assault, offense, and murder, which refer to an ordinary criminal framework. Overall, forced disappearance was enunciated 95 times, mostly by *La Jornada*, with 74 cases. Forced disappearances can only be executed by state officers, so their lexical use matches a designation of the victimizer, while the words that refer to ordinary crimes provide enough fuzziness to avoid pointing out direct responsibilities.

**Table 3.**

*Usage frequency of the “forced disappearance” and “crimes against humanity”*

*noun phrases*

Forced disappearance	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Total	Crimes against humanity	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Total
<i>La Jornada</i>	2	36	36	74	<i>La Jornada</i>	0	31	11	42
<i>Reforma</i>	0	17	4	21	<i>Reforma</i>	0	2	1	3

Source: Personally prepared, 2015

As shown on Table 3, aspects such as time and publication journal are decisive in how often this NP is enunciated. Over the first three days following the event, the “forced disappearance” NP was used only twice in the journal *La Jornada*, while in *Reforma* it was not used at all. Its use substantially increased in October, which could reflect the dispute on establishing lexical fields in order to name the events. Moreover, the different usage frequencies in one journal or another allow us to identify different attitudes towards the interpretation of the event: in *La Jornada*’s corpus, it is more common to see not only this NP, but other phrases linked to it as well. Although its incidence is still low in relation to the use of other terms, in this journal of judgmental nature, “forced disappearance” is quoted three times more than in *Reforma*.

<sup>14</sup> In the international conventions framework, forced disappearance is considered a person’s confinement by State officers, groups or individuals that act with their support, followed by the denial to recognize such confinement or its fate, with the purpose of seizing it from protection by the law.

The first time the “forced disappearance” NP appears in the corpus is on September 30 in *La Jornada*’s front page, with the subheading “Hay elementos para fincar el delito de desaparición forzada, manifiesta” (It is stated that “There are elements to underpin the forced disappearance crime”), which comes from the main title “Acusa la PGJE de homicidio calificado a 22 policías de Iguala” (“The State Attorney General’s Office [PGJE] Accuses 22 Iguala Police Officers of Attempted Murder”) (“Acusa la PGJE...”, 2014)]. Another way of counteracting the liability is replacing the “forced disappearance” NP with words or phrases like “kidnapping”, “unlawful confinement” or “disappearance”, or calling the “missing-detainees” “absent”, “unfound”, “missing”, or “kidnapped” (Gatti, 2008). In one of its main titles from October 19, *Reforma* stated “Acumula sexenio 8 mil no localizados” (“8 Thousand Missing in Six Years”) (2014), making reference to the amount of people who have disappeared in Mexico over the last six years.

One of the most common words used to describe Guerrero’s events is “kidnapping”. It is used both in the news and in publishing houses, as well as in verbatim testimonials of agents involved. This term commonly appears along with words like “disappearance” or “disappearing”, leading to the creation of some sort of reference framework that does not distinguish between the formal meanings of each of the terms that refer to different types of violence, and, most of all, that set differentiated responsibilities. While the term “disappearance” is used in reference to the testimonials of citizens and activists, other terms like “kidnapping” and “homicide” refer to the official version and the ordinary journalistic language (See Table 4). Similarly, in this complex network of meanings, “kidnapping” is used both for naming the action of the students who seized the buses and the event that made the students disappear, proving the severity of the events with the intention of minimizing the nature of the missing students as victims.

**Table 4.**

*Words that describe the context of the event*

Keywords	<i>La Jornada</i>				<i>Reforma</i>			Total	
	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Total LJ	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Total R	
Repression	6	64	104	<b>174</b>	0	9	8	<b>17</b>	<b>191</b>
Corruption	1	47	125	<b>173</b>	0	39	22	<b>61</b>	<b>234</b>
Impunity	2	144	137	<b>283</b>	0	47	19	<b>66</b>	<b>349</b>
Secret pits	1	260	116	<b>377</b>	0	128	32	<b>160</b>	<b>537</b>
Violence	15	251	377	<b>643</b>	11	126	85	<b>222</b>	<b>865</b>

Source: Personally prepared, 2015.

The use of terminology associated with criminal violence could be expressing two simultaneous phenomena: on the one hand, the substantiation of a lexicon related to racketeering, which has been strongly established over the last years in Mexico in the “War against Drugs” framework to

name new conflicts. On the other hand, the low penetration of the Human Rights discourse in the language used by the national press, which matches its merely diplomatic and legal use —a monopoly of certain elites that use this narrative for their own interests (Arroyo Juárez, 2002).

## Historization

The journalistic discourse, aside from describing the event and presenting different versions of it, gives the facts a historical nature. In other words, it creates context comprehension frameworks by referring to their praxis in a specific time and space.<sup>15</sup> Within the scope of giving the disappearance of the students a historical nature, at least two different situations take place. On the one hand, a field of conflicts related to the so-called war against drugs and the “unclear” violence of undefined agents disputing economic interests is described (Robledo Silvestre, 2015). In this field of meanings, the State appears to be corrupt, incompetent, and involved in racketeering. On the other hand, mostly from the dissident voices, a historical continuity among the students’ disappearance, the previous forms of political repression, and the elimination of the internal enemy is marked making reference to the systematic and pervasive nature of this crime in Mexico.

The term “violence”, commonly used in the journalistic discourse, turns out to be inaccurate in expressing the specific conflicts to which the phenomenon of the forced disappearance of people pertains.<sup>16</sup> On one side, impunity sets a framework of the State’s responsibilities and eventually becomes more important as a condition associated with the forced disappearance of the young students and with other disappearance cases in Mexico. Another aspect of the context that commonly appears is the discovery of secret pits in the place where the events took place, which begins to set a comprehension field regarding the systematic and pervasive nature of this crime: “México es una tumba clandestina” (“Mexico is a secret grave”) (2014).

On the other hand, opinion columns, especially from *La Jornada*, relate the event to the “recurrent pursuit” of the students (Navarro Gallegos, 2014) and call it a “crime against humanity” (Hernández Navarro, 2014). On this matter, the report presented by the Comisión de la Verdad de Guerrero (Truth Commission of Guerrero) on October 5, 2014 made it possible to broaden the debate and lay the foundations for a historization process as to what happened to the students (“La impunidad...”, 2014). Ayotzinapa is described as an event that follows the systematic violation of human rights which started in the 70’s. Since then, a field of possibilities to give sense to the current violence in Mexico has been opened (“La impunidad...”, 2014).

<sup>15</sup> According to Ellacuría (2012), historization in the Human Rights field happens through the analysis of real conditions, without which the intentional purposes and the introduction of time dimensions are not able to exist, in order to quantify and verify when ideal proclamations can become facts, or at least reach an acceptable degree of achievement.

<sup>16</sup> Unlike earlier times (especially in the 70’s) in which words related to State violence were used more often, like “repression” and “dirty war”, among others, regarding the forced disappearance of people.

## Validation

Due to the denial and neutralization effect imposed on the discourse, the dissident voices promote some kind of “validation”, which involves making what they consider a reality conceivable and proving its certainty. In this case, it involves validating the victimization and the violation of human rights that took place. During the validation process, words that refer to the designation of responsibilities, such as “forced disappearance”, “State crime”, or “human rights violations”, appear to be critical.

Family members of the 43 young students missing since September 26 warned the president of the Federal Attorney General’s Office (PGR), Jesús Murillo Karam, of turning to the *writ of amparo* before the Mexican courts if he did not indict all those who have been arrested because of their involvement in the Iguala case, for the forced-disappearance-of-people and genocide crimes (Méndez, 2014).

Aside from the statements of activists, opinion leaders, victims, and civil organization representatives, the press renders releases emitted by public and private educational institutions, political parties, scholar groups, unions, and others that express their opinion on the events. These releases broaden the interpretation field pointing out liabilities and naming the events in the human rights area. For this matter, the press links perlocutionary acts in which it pinpoints the agents and recognizes the State, the dissident voices, and the journalistic media as independent entities, since up until now the State and the press seemed to be working as one (Fairclough, & Fairclough, 2012).<sup>17</sup>

These institutional approaches are set up against concealment strategies such as the neutralization and denial of the events that end up “de-realizing” the crimes committed. Arroyo Juárez states that “in order for a crime to be punished, the participation of a third party is required” (2002, p. 483). In this case, the third party is the public opinion, and the organized society, which acts as a witness, empathizes with the victim and is resistant to the denial and neutralization discourses.

<sup>17</sup> In the journalistic texts of the first 15 days following the events, the presence of dissident voices is almost nonexistent.

## DISCUSSION

The analysis on the representation of the facts in the press's concealing of the case of the 43 students that disappeared in Ayotzinapa makes it possible to recognize two discursive strategies geared towards hiding the reality: denial and neutralization. As mentioned in the theoretical section, the press acts as a mechanism for reproducing forms of power, from which it attempts to provide frameworks for the interpretation of reality. In this specific position, the journalistic discourse reproduces dominant ideologies that link violence to a framework of ordinary crimes, neutralizing the practice of serious human rights violations and denying the liability of the government agents, as well as the victim's legitimacy.

The linguistic evidence of the analyzed journalistic discourse illustrates these ways of reproducing dominant ideologies, which aim to confuse and support impunity while making it possible to recognize breaches in these frameworks used to express the truth.

Despite the power of this hegemonic discourse, social resistances have positioned a visible discourse in the historization and validation, in support of human rights and the pursuit of social justice, which is formalized in a privileged way through quotes and references to direct discourses of witnesses and experts that validate the occurrence of violations and the existence of the victims. In this sense, it is clear that linguistic applications activate certain contexts that make it possible to relate the students' disappearance to two different discourses. On the one hand, as a collateral effect inside the State's security policies; according to Van Dijk (2009), as a way of legitimating power; and, on the other hand, as one of the cases of human rights violation and crimes against humanity in the country.

The strength and social position of the first discourse is unquestionable every time justice is still not rendered and reliable answers about the destiny of the missing students are not provided. However, the importance of public opinion and civil society's actions to disprove and reveal the official discourse, for the purpose of denying and neutralizing the events, is clear. Without the participation of analysts, scholars, victims, activists, and society in general in the debate, the case of Ayotzinapa would have gone unnoticed, as many other cases, and the discourse built around it would have hardly broadened the victim and liability acknowledgement frameworks.

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## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

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The authors deny the existence of conflicts of interest with any type of institution or commercial association.

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