

1. Introduction

Mexico held general elections in 2018 on which a relatively new political party, *Movimiento de Regeneración Nacional* (Morena) National Regeneration Movement won in landslide not only the presidential seat, but also obtained majority in both senate and congress, as well as in state governments. Such majority allows a never seen before level of maneuver for the president Andres Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) and his political will.

The overwhelming electoral success has a two sided explanation, first is AMLO himself as a veteran political leftist figure always publicizing honesty and frugality. But to many accounts, the popular vote favored Morena and AMLO as a punishment vote to the predecessor right wing *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (PRI) Institutional Revolutionary Party that governed Mexico since 1929 until 2018 with a hiatus between 2000 and 2012 (Casar, 2018 and Navarro, 2019).

Numerous scandals emerged during the last 2012 – 2018 PRI administration, among them, 11 PRI governors are facing prosecution for major fraud charges, a millionaire mansion owned by the president's wife exposed collusion between a construction company and the government, and many more. Yet the most prominent case of injustice in Mexico during this period is the enforced disappearance of 43 students in the southern state of Guerrero where state security forces and government officials were highly involved (Times Live, 2018). AMLO campaigned with the promise to obliterate corruption and impunity.

This essay first provides a representation analysis using historical and sociological lenses, with an emphasis on mourning politics of the Ayotzinapa 43 students case that works as an explanatory background to grasp the societal relevance of the case.

Secondly, it carries out a membership categorization analysis from the transcribed text of a press conference offered by the Mexico general prosecutor on June 30, 2020 in which he announced a drastic shift from the previous investigation and prosecution of the Ayotzinapa 43 students case. This media statement is relevant not only to the case itself, but as a vehicle of a strong political message that attempts to draw a line dividing the previous and the new administration.

2. Background

On September 26 2014, students of the Ayotzinapa rural normal school in the southern state of Guerrero were on their way to Mexico City to participate in the protests that every year take place on October 2 commemorating the massive killings of students of 1968.

On board of commercial buses, they were intercepted in the city of Iguala by a conglomerate composed by local and federal police, military and organized crime (which didn't fight against each other, but worked together in an articulated manner). The students were attacked by gunfire when they were inside the buses and even on the street when came down surrendering. Some of them were killed *in-situ*, some successfully ran away, some were wounded and taken to a hospital, while 43 were forcibly disappeared (Forensic Architecture, 2019).

The investigation conducted by the Attorney General Office concluded six weeks later after the attack providing the official version of the case that synthetically is as follows: the students were forcibly abducted by local police forces who were colluded with a local organized crime group who ultimately killed them, calcined their bodies and later disposed them in a river (Presidencia Enrique Peña Nieto, 2014), this is known as the historical truth.

This investigation was performed by an administration that already was under a crisis of credibility and left too many questions unanswered (Aristegui, 2015). It became increasingly evident that escape goats were used and key officials were protected (Ramírez, 2019).

This version has been overwhelmingly refuted by different accounts, but most prominently by the Interdisciplinary Group of Independent Experts, a special commission created for this case by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights by, mainly, identifying indications that testimonies were obtained under torture, evidence was tampered and planted, lack of prosecution to high ranking officials or any member of the military and that the Attorney General office obstructed and limited their investigation (GIEI, 2016).

The general sentiment on the government's mismanagement of the case opened an old wound in the Mexican memory: "lies hurt more than the truth", reference that connects this event with the 1968 massacre of students and how the government cynically covered up and minimized the tragedy (Reyes, 2015).

Even though this is a horrific happening, human rights violation cases are not rare in Mexico's recent history. Further analysis is needed to contextualize the reasons why this case has become the current emblem of state violence in Mexico.

2.1 Historical context

Rural normal schools are a symbolic outcome of the Mexican revolution struggle that among many other claims, cried for land ownership and education access to peasants. These schools were highly influenced in the 1930s by a socialist education mandate where, more than just educating, "a [rural] teacher should also deal with the issues of the peasantry emancipation" (Civera Cerecedo, 2013: 150).

As consequence, the environment of the rural normal schools became highly politicized and also breeding ground and stronghold of social fighters and dissidents. One prominent figure was Lucio Cabañas, an Ayotzinapa normal school graduate that later became a guerrilla fighter who mostly fought against the repressive rule of the governor of state of Guerrero in the 1970s (Salazar, 2014).

If not socialist, education in Mexico was at least popular and reformist in the practice. Such vision became notorious in the 1950s, among others, with the Mexican Magisterial Movement led by members of the teacher's national union that organized numerous strikes at a local and national level demanding broader rights of representation within the unions as well as betterment of economic and social conditions (Loyo, 1978).

But the next two decades were characterized by a constant clash between social movements and escalating state repression by the hand of the PRI party that increasingly dominated and monopolized the state political space in Mexico for the next 50 years (Lara-Ovando, 2016).

A state repression machinery was developed by the engagement and participation of the military and paramilitary groups in counterinsurgency practices against peasant guerrillas and social activists by intimidation, killings and enforced disappearance. Known as Mexico's "dirty war", a low-intensity conflict in the 1960s and 1970s with an unknown number of victims (Aviña, 2016).

The highest point in this context came in 1968 with a nation-wide coalition of students and teachers with protests and rallies against increasing authoritarianism, with the last one held in Mexico City days before the start of the summer Olympics in which military and paramilitary groups massacred hundreds of protesters (Borden, 2005). Government officials repeatedly stated what came to be known as the historical truth: that provocateurs had fired shots at the army, killing both students and soldiers; the government acknowledged a total death toll of 30 persons and concluded that there were no obstacles for the celebration of the games (Aguayo Quezada, 1998: 131-135).

The “night of Tlatelolco” has since then become the epitome of the student movement of 1968 (Markarian, 2004) but also the emblem of state repression and social indignation.

2.2 Membership and the politics of mourning

A dialogue can be seen between the events of state violence and revolutionary causes: Mexican revolution in the 1910s was a response to state violence in the form of impoverishment of the working class. In the 1960s and 1970s, students and teachers leagues as well as guerrillas answered back to authoritarianism in the repressive regime of the PRI party.

Not surprisingly, Mexican society is highly critical of the government and its actions in an otherizing discourse. Despite a staggering inequality, the collective imaginary of civil society works in a constant dichotomy: the government vs us, the society (Hernández, 2008).

This can also be seen in form of memberships, although their openness is rather narrow. State violence in the form of repression and authoritarianism represents *them*, which also has its own narrative and representation: the historical truth. In this context, the society membership splits in two ways: (1) the witnessing society and (2) the victims who suffer repression and authoritarianism and, more importantly, are represented as innocent victims. The symbolism of these victims lies in their cohesive societal characteristic. A bonding social injury that hurts us all.

Drake argues that in the constitution of collective identities, “some bodies are more significant than others” (Drake, 2013). One could argue that the several thousands of victims within the context of organized crime activities should have the same effect. But the nature of the victims in these tragedies lie in their depiction of innocence presumption, but also, on the fact that they were students and that they had chosen a rightful path of living.

As innocents are killed with impunity by the state, the society mourns, not in an “immediate affect against reason” (Drake, 2013), but in a political act of “investment of meaning” (Rose, 1996). It provides both the commemoration and honoring political act, but also serves as a cohesive action of the society under a common cause of justice, while it emphasizes the othering from the repressive government.

My argument is that mourning politics bonds both tragedies together under a single claim for social justice, joined by the same injury of the historical truth. Yet the expectancy of holding responsible the political actors of the 1968 massacre seems distant as these are old age or have already died, such as the then president Gustavo Díaz Ordaz, while the Ayotzinapa case provides a better outlook and with a new administration that promises a political will to make justice and therefore, comes to a front line of social condemnation.

3. Media release

Below I transcribed and translated to English the press conference offered by Alejandro Gertz Manero, Mexico's General Prosecutor on June 30, 2020 (RompevientoTV, 2020). Although he references two issues at the beginning of his speech, I'm only analyzing the first.

Good morning, I want to inform you about two fundamental issues for the procurement of justice in Mexico.

The first is the Ayotzinapa case. Yesterday, the Prosecutor General of the Republic's Office requested 46 arrest warrants for federal criminal proceedings against public servants from various municipalities in the state of Guerrero, all of them are accused of crimes of enforced disappearance and organized crime. It is necessary to make very clear that these crimes had not been neither investigated nor prosecuted in the proceedings that at the time [2014] were carried out by the Attorney General of the Republic's Office.

The requested arrest warrants are added to those already obtained on March 10 [2020] against officials of the Attorney General of the Republic's Office, among them is Tomás "Z", who fled the country and already has an arrest warrant and an Interpol red notice for their location at international level and its corresponding extradition; and yesterday, the arrest of José Ángel "N", alias "El Mochomo" who was a participant of great notoriety in this case.

I think it is necessary to briefly expose the background of this matter. In September 2014 the then Attorney General of the Republic's Office arrested various officials who were released at differentiated times due to the inconsistency and partiality of the accusations that failed to point out all the violations that these individuals committed during their time in the case, including arbitrary detention, torture, delay in routines, the violation of the rights of the defense and violations of the procedure, also hiding substantial evidence that would allow the victims' fate to be reliably known.

In 2019 the new Prosecutor's Office through the Human Rights Special Prosecutor Ms. Sara Irene Herrerías, as well as the Ayotzinapa case Special Prosecutor Mr. Omar Gómez Trejo, new investigations were initiated for various crimes that had not been processed before and that do not have procedural obstacles to be executed since they fundamentally consist of enforced disappearance of the victims, organized crime activities as well as the true whereabouts of the missing persons.

All the proceedings carried out during this new period of investigation, along with its testimonial evidence, has been confronted with the sequence of events and with the location identification experts' report and have allowed establishing the chronology of what happened as well as the participation of those who committed these crimes. Additionally, human remains that were found during this new administration and this new investigation have been sent to the Innsbruck University for identification, on which results are expected immediately.

Our investigation is still ongoing and at the end of this week we expect to prosecute other officials of various levels and to provide more information about the human remains previously

mentioned, with reference to the places where these were found and with proceedings strictly in accordance with the law.

The information gathered throughout this investigation has made possible to identify the enforced disappearance and the organized crime actions. The prosecutor of Ayotzinapa Mr. Omar Gómez Trejo will provide a detailed report in the rightful time, so that this new stage can be managed with absolute transparency and legality.

The historical truth is over.

3.1 In-depth text analysis

Paragraph	Actors	Characteristics	Actions	Where/When
Paragraph 1	•I	•issues •justice	•inform •procurement	
Paragraph 2	•Prosecutor General of the Republic's Office •public servants •Attorney General of the Republic's Office	•Ayotzinapa case •46 arrest warrants •criminal •very clear •crimes •proceedings •crimes of enforced disappearance •organized crime	•requested •accused •make •investigated •prosecuted •carried out	•various municipalities in the state of Guerrero •at the time [2014]
Paragraph 3	•Officials of the Attorney General of the Republic's Office •Tomás "Z" •them •José Ángel "N" alias "El Mochomo" •participant	•arrest warrants •against •Interpol red notice •arrest •great notoriety •this case	•requested •added •already obtained •fled the country •already has	•March 10 [2020] •yesterday
Paragraph 4	•Attorney General of the Republic's Office •various officials	•necessary •background •inconsistency •partiality •accusations •violations •arbitrary detention •torture •delay in routines •violation of the rights of the defense •violations of the	•think •arrested •released •failed •committed •hiding •known	•September 2014

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> procedure •substantial evidence •victims' fate •reliably 		
•Paragraph 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •new Prosecutor's Office •Human Rights Special Prosecutor Ms. Sara Irene Herrerías •Ayotzinapa case Special Prosecutor Mr. Omar Gómez Trejo •victims •missing persons 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •new investigations •various crimes •procedural obstacles •fundamentally •enforced disappearance •organized crime activities •true whereabouts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •initiated •consist •processed •executed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •2019 •before
Paragraph 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •experts •those who 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •proceedings •investigation •testimonial evidence •sequence of events •location •report •chronology •participation •crimes •human remains •new administration •new investigation •results •immediately 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •carried out •confronted •allowed •establishing •happened •committed •found •sent •identification •expected 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •new period •Innsbruck University
Paragraph 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •other officials 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Our investigation •various levels •more information •human remains •proceedings •strictly •accordance •law 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •ongoing •expect •prosecute •provide •mentioned •found 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •end of this week •previously •places where
Paragraph 8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •prosecutor of Ayotzinapa Mr. Omar Gómez Trejo 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •information •investigation •enforced disappearance •organized crime actions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •gathered •made possible •identify •provide •can be 	

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •detailed report •rightful time •new stage •absolute •transparency •legality 	•managed	
Paragraph 9		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •historical •truth •over 	•is	

3.2 Membership Categorization Analysis: Landmark of Political Divide

As I watched the live streaming of this speech in real time, I realized very quickly it contained a highly dividing rhetoric in a very simple presentation as good vs bad. But throughout the repetition of the video, the transcription and translation, I became aware that it is a lot more than that. The membership categorization analysis goes right into the relation between membership categories by “a formal analysis of the procedures people employ to make sense of other people and their activities” (Leudar and Marsland, 2004), which provides the raw material to decipher a broader and more meaningful intention of this communication.

But first, it is crucial to acknowledge that in this speech, the prosecutor is differentiating two justice procurement figures, namely Attorney General and Prosecutor General, on which the first was a legal figure extincted in 2018 via a constitutional reform and replaced by the second. Theoretically, the Attorney General figure was a subordinate position from the executive branch of government, while the Prosecutor General is an independent body with the aim of avoiding conflicts of interest and the political usage of justice procurement.

Therefore, *attorney general*, along with *Tomás “Z”* (referring to Tomás Zerón, a top official in the previous administration), *various officials* and *public servants* refer to “them”; while *prosecutor general* and the *special prosecutors* refer to “us” or even “me”. This is the top divide in the narrative, from which all categories such as *criminal*, *inconsistency*, *partiality*, *violations*, *torture*, *accusations*, etc. are on the side of “them”, while *justice*, *arrest warrants*, *necessary*, *new investigation*, *sequence of events*, *new administration*, *results*, *immediately*, *strictly*, *law*” are on the “us” side.

Even including a bunch of fancy words, the narrative is really simple, while not less powerful: The *old* investigation of *them* is corrupt and we not only are doing what *they* didn’t do, we are doing *justice* to the case, but to *them* as well. The narrative also is about the making of the enemy by distancing the previous administration and *their* investigation from the new administration and *our* investigation, where the enemies are no longer the perpetrators of the disappearance of the 43 students, but the administration that covered it.

Also important is that the speech is delivered by the prosecutor himself in front of the cameras and not by a spokesperson or a press communique. The intention of the press conference is to look confrontational and belligerent as it sends clear and sound message: “we expect to prosecute other officials of various levels”. Thus, the *us* membership is closed, but the membership of *them* is open, meaning that the *new administration* is already in place and is called by their names and official positions, but we haven’t yet found and/or prosecuted all those implicated from the *old administration*.

The above analysis allows us also see the most salient topic and purpose of the press conference. By quantify the keywords that relate to what was badly done and how we are fixing it vs the references to the actual clarification to the case, it becomes evident this is not about the acts of violence and doing justice, but the politics about the investigation of it and politics broadly speaking.

It is about a new, clean start that does justice to the historical happening but more importantly, is different from the previous administration that is corrupt. Finally, with all intention attacks at the core of the social injury with “the historical truth is over”, fairly translated as “we are ending the lies they told you” and the new administration is no longer on the other side, but “on your side”.

5. Conclusion

The intention behind the press conference here analyzed not only comes with a public propaganda of justice intention, but also seeks to place the new administration under a new category and membership. It was rightfully assessed that the social claim for justice in the Ayotzinapa 43 students case now comprises the entirety, or at least, the most pressing matter of social discontent and distrust to government actions and investigations.

The arguments of social justice in the Mexican popular imaginary are still attached to purist ideals such as transparency, truth and innocence of the victims. Outrage, indignation and mourning are loud manifestations of the social unrest, so it was the state vindication act from the new administration in which some form of justice was announced against the enemy of the society, the old government. The effects of the new normal where the state represents itself as an ally of the society is yet to be seen.

5. Referencing

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