

IT WAS THE STATE (1965-1990)

Final Report of the Mechanism for Truth and Historical Clarification

2024

Volume 1, Chapter 1

It Was the State: A New Narrative of the Period

I.

It was the State! This is the unyielding cry of survivors, family members and collectives that echoes throughout our country. Their worthy struggle challenges and rebukes power for the atrocities committed by an autocratic State. Their historical demand is inflexible and impetuous. Their fury, unstoppable, because truth and justice still do not yet shine on the horizon.

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The courage and persistence of victims created the conditions that made it possible to denounce grave human rights violations. Their collective action, as legitimate actors with their own voice, made this report possible. Their contribution is vast. Their voices and stories wove this new narrative. With their force and organization, they sparked an unprecedented process that provided consistency to the Mechanism for Truth and Historical Clarification. They helped us clear the way to pursue new scenarios, ones that promote truth, justice, reparations, and non-repetition for all victims.

We add our voices to those of the victims then and now, to those of the survivors, to those of the collectives and of society, to say it loud and clear: It was the State. We say this because the findings of the historical clarification investigation corroborate it, with the same forcefulness with which it has also been demonstrated that the State was responsible for the disappearance of the 43 Ayotzinapa students, almost a decade ago. We say that it was the State because the declaration of this slogan, of this denunciation, connects the old pain with the new, the past with the present. We say that it was the State because it was the first and last entity responsible for grave human rights violations during the period 1965-1990, beyond the responsibility of individual perpetrators. It was the State because the State created the hegemonic narrative that justified violence as a way to maintain civil peace and the stability of the country – when in fact it was only supporting spurious political and economic interests.

It was the State, we say, because the paradigm shift from counterinsurgency to the war on drugs only meant one more twist in this long history of repression, a revision to the justification of a profoundly corrupt and anti-democratic regime, savage with its people and servile with the elites. It was the State that condemned the vast majority of this country to suffer the structural violence of poverty and misery, and those who fought for a more equitable Mexico to suffer its armed violence. It was the State itself that generated the causes of rebellion and dissidence, and that was responsible for drowning them in blood and fire. It was that State, in its greed, its despotism, and its brutality.

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II.

Between 1965 and 1990, Mexico experienced a period of intense state violence. During this time, the State committed grave human rights violations in a systematic and widespread manner against large sectors of the population. The human cost of these atrocities reveals the bloodiest aspect of the formation of an autocratic State that – operating from the logic of counterinsurgency – put its political and economic goals before the rights of the people.

We are talking about a State whose criminal conduct resulted in thousands of victims of torture, people who were disappeared, people who lost their lives in massacres due to military occupations and police sieges, victims of political imprisonment, victims of sexual torture, and a toll of entire displaced communities, families who left their homes, their land, their roots.

The Mechanism for Truth and Historical Clarification presents its final Report to the victims, the president of the Republic and Mexican society as a whole. It does so with the hope that, as an exercise in memory and truth, it constitutes both an end point and a continuation of the tireless struggle that groups of victims and relatives have maintained for decades for the right to memory, truth, non-repetition, reparation, and justice. It does so with the conviction that its findings, conclusions and recommendations have the capacity to trigger transitional justice processes based on the pending agenda the Truth Commission leaves behind. It is one more effort in a fight that does not begin or conclude with this work. As stated: end point and continuation.

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This Report gives an account of the extent and intensity of the violence exercised by the Mexican State, of the breadth of the groups and social actors who were victims of the State's counterinsurgency logic. Members of political-military organizations, party dissidents, student movements and labor-union movements were targets of this violence for ideological-political reasons. However, the clarification's findings show conclusively that the State's repression was not limited to these spheres. During those years, efforts were made to discipline a variety of populations that the State considered to be breeding grounds for potential dissidents who might question its hegemony. The violence went much further. The coercive means of the State were put not only at the service of its political ends, but also at the service and defense of a model of extractivist economic development, of capital accumulation, in which the State became a participant in a criminal economy.

The violations committed against those who joined movements of peasants, doctors, railroad workers, and students – in the midst of inequality, marginalization, exclusion, and poverty – tell the story of dispossession and of *cacique*, police, and military violence against which surged revolutionary action in broad regions of the country. These violations also tell the story of resistance, of grassroots organization, of the defense of territory, of autonomy, of the determination of peoples. That resistance, almost always silent, is the correlation of the noise of state violence.

The work of listening carried out by the Mechanism of Historical Clarification not only acknowledged the heart-wrenching stories of grave human rights violations committed against thousands of victims; it also heard that other history – delegitimized and criminalized by the rhetoric of a Mexico dedicated to industrialized progress that distanced itself wholly from communitarian and diverse ways of living. We dared to look and we saw. We dared to listen and we heard.

III.

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According to what this investigation was able to document, the widespread nature of the violations was further confirmed by the fact that they occurred against diverse groups of victims. That is, against peasant, indigenous and Afro-Mexican communities, against those who were active in urban-popular movements, against communities violated by the imposition of development policies, against political-partisan dissidents, against people from the gender-diverse community, against journalists, against refugees on the southern border of Mexico, against residents of areas where the fight against drug trafficking was carried out, against people marginalized and criminalized due to their vulnerable conditions, against people who were part of some religious dissidence, and even serious violations committed against members of the armed forces and police at the hands of their own commanders.

That is: between 1965 and 1990, grave violations were committed against at least eleven groups of victims who until now remained invisible, under the idea that the State had directed its force exclusively against members of political-military organizations, militants of student movements and those who participated in labor movements. Altogether, the Historical Clarification Report inaugurates a new narrative about this period of our history, which shows that there were not only three, but at least fourteen large groups of victims who directly suffered state violence in the context of counterinsurgency.

The Final Clarification Report, in its collection *It Was the State (1965-1990)*, presents in-depth documentation of cases of grave human rights violations committed against these other eleven groups of victims. The above is in accordance with the agreement reached between the Mechanism's Commissioners as a way of organizing the work and deepening our study of the different topics. Below, we list some examples that show just the tip of the iceberg of what Mexican society will find in the following pages. This work was achieved through a joint effort of all the research teams that made up the Mechanism to collect testimony from 1,139 people, who generously shared their story. To achieve this, we carried out 148 field work trips in 23 areas of the country, which also permitted the consultation of thousands of documents within 95 public and private archives.

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III. [sic]

This work also allowed us to identify specific institutional and individual responsibilities. In many cases, the correspondence of responsibilities is such that they involve the same entities, sometimes even the same characters. The perpetrators who repressed political-military organizations were the same ones that the State used to combat a wide range of dissidents, as was the case of the Special Brigade (White Brigade) of the Federal Directorate of Security (DFS). Entities that, rather than specializing in repressing a segment of the population, specialized in perfecting criminal practices and techniques. However, the findings show a more complex panorama, which allows us to see beyond the usual suspects to reveal a variety of actors who made up the networks that gave life to the repressive institutionalized nature of the Mexican State. Responsibility for systematic violations did respond, in many cases, to coordinated and centrally articulated strategies in which the chain of command irrefutably pointed to the President or to the Ministry of the Interior, as in the massacre of October 2. However, this was not always the case.

As we explained previously and will document in this collection, the counterinsurgency field of action enabled state institutions to act within a cognitive and discursive context that authorized and legitimized every type of abuse. The perpetrators were allowed complete discretion; that is, to establish their own circuits of corruption and extortion to extract income from vulnerable populations with impunity. The counterinsurgency field of action gave them a blank check for the management of crime, whatever it was, in exchange for the security they provided the State. It is in this room for maneuver that the State's acquiescence in the violation of human rights assumed its true form.

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IV.

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We observed the instrumentalization of many practices during this period. That is, beyond the political objectives of the State, counterinsurgency practices and tactics were appropriated by different perpetrators, stripping them of their original purpose to be used at the service of whatever particular end was desired. In this regard, one of the new findings of our research was the confirmation that military practices we previously thought were limited to certain contexts and regions were also activated for different objectives. For example, we now have evidence that the military tactic known as “death flights” was not limited to the Pie de la Cuesta air base to disappear and execute members of political-military organizations; it was also used against community leaders who defended their people against the imposition of a hydroelectric plant in Chiapas.

The instrumentalization of practices and tactics builds a bridge with the present, since it allows the existence of forms of violence beyond the timeframe of the paradigm in which they were created. The war on drugs, as the new focal point, took the lead, reorganizing state violence around a new ideological axis: the militarization of public security and the application of security solutions to a wide range of public problems. The internal enemy with a communist profile was displaced by the figures of the cartel and the kingpin. The fight against drug trafficking became the new justification for the deployment and intervention of the military in public life. Despite this, this new reorganization coexisted with openly counterinsurgent plans, even during the 1990s. The clearest example was the fight against the Zapatista communities in Chiapas.

When actors appropriate practices, they can put them at the service of new rapacious ends. State violence does not fade over time. On the contrary, many of its elements tend to endure and even become more complex or amplified in light of new actors and challenges. Nor does State violence end by official decree or historiographic convention. The institutionality that allowed the serious, systematic, and widespread violation of human rights generated a long-term momentum. That is the story told by all societies with strong autocratic pasts. For this reason, an exercise in truth-telling assumes that a question about the recent past is also a question about the present. Talking about what remains, understanding why it endures and drawing connections to prevent it from continuing is a historical, social and political imperative for a Historical Clarification Report.

In this vein, the collection *It Was the State (1965-1990)* addresses factors of persistence of state violence. That is, elements derived from the clarification research during the period 1965-1990 that shed light on

institutional inertia; about the continuity of mechanisms and patterns that violate human rights, about the ways in which impunity and the lack of access to justice and reparation in cases perpetuate the effects against the victims; and on the permanence of the perpetrators in spheres of power.

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Looking in the mirror of the past inspires us to continue. It calls us to ask ourselves, as every truth commission ends up doing, how to prevent it from happening again? In this sense, and in accordance with the mandate that considers efforts towards non-repetition and the development of proposals, the collection *It Was the State (1965-1990)* of the Historical Clarification Report contains recommendations. Particularly in matters of memory and non-repetition, regarding the repair of damage and recognition of victims, in matters of justice, security as the articulating axis of state violence in today's Mexico, in matters of archives and monitoring of the recommendations themselves; all of them directed at specific instances of the State in whose jurisdiction it is to take action on the matter to continue dismantling the shackles of the past from within the State.

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V.

In this narrative there is a theoretical and political commitment, but also an ethical one. From a truth commission, the truth can only be experienced as multiple, as a product of a collective construction where the centrality lies with the victims. Within this context, the Historical Clarification Mechanism developed methodologies and formats for a broad and diverse listening to the victims as part of an effort to vindicate, dignify and acknowledge them.

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They are the voices of those who suffered first-hand the violence of the State, voices that were silenced for having a different opinion, for questioning what they considered unjust, or for challenging the powerful. They are the dissidents of this country, voices that in many cases were moved to share their stories for the very first time, no matter how painful they continue to be. In those voices are condensed the sorrow and defeat of a generation – of two, three generations – but their joy is present too, their small and enormous victories, their commitment to a cause, and their stubbornness, their beautiful stubbornness in imagining that another life, another country was possible. This opportunity to listen was unprecedented, it was unique. Some of the people who generously shared their testimony today are no longer with us, they departed without truth, without justice. Their voices survive in the grandchildren, who also accompanied us with their testimonies. From herein, all these voices are part of the social repository that will fertilize new fields of future and hope.

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VI.

What happened in those years allows us to understand today's Mexico in more ways than one, not only in relation to specific violations. In this regard, some last thoughts.

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Along the way we have heard from many people involved in acts of state violence: victims, perpetrators, social actors. Given this, we wanted to generate an inclusive truth, which would not only account for the atrocities committed, but would also help explain the violence and grave human rights violations, as well as the factors of persistence. That is to say, our task was not only to produce a Report, but also to contribute to a process of assimilation of a much broader truth that projects into the future.

After the disclosure of serious human rights violations by previous regimes and past conflicts, the next step is to find appropriate ways for them to be recognized by the State and the perpetrators. That is also part of the truth. Of course, it is necessary to *know*, before prosecuting, pardoning, or initiating a process of reconciliation. The problem is that these violations have been denied or justified by the perpetrators and by the State that has sheltered them. The point is not so much a lack of knowledge as a refusal by those involved to acknowledge the existence of these atrocities, their unjustifiable nature, and their own role in them. This is a political question.

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Finally, we truly want to be an interlocutor for society in general and, in particular, for victims and survivors. We intend this Final Report to motivate the continuation of the struggle for truth, justice, reparation, and non-repetition in our country. No recognition would be greater for the work we have done than for these pages to open a space for wide-ranging conversation, calling on people to face their past to build a more just, democratic, and inclusive future. Our Report is a point of arrival, but also a point of departure for new scenarios and struggles. It is, therefore, an end point and a continuation.

Chila, Yahualica, and Nuevo Matzam should be inscribed in the collective memory along with the other names that represent grief for contemporary Mexico: Corpus Cristi, Aguas Blancas, Atenco. The dates of all those events should have their place and space for protest like the one that is saved for October 2, all of them, in squares and streets, to acknowledge a memory that – like a sustained note – reminds us even in the most everyday moments of the urgency of non-repetition. We should count to 650 as we count to 43, and do a roll call of all these victims of state counterinsurgency violence, evoking all its breadth and heterogeneity, since that complexity resonates with victims of the violations and acts of violence in the present day: It was the State, just as it was during those years. Each of these pages is a spear that we break to contribute to the strengthening of full citizenship and a powerful culture of human rights as the foundation of our democracy.

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