

## The Journalistic Construction of the March for the One-year Anniversary of Ayotzinapa: A Comparative Study of the International Media Coverage<sup>1</sup>

*Construcción periodística de la marcha  
por el primer aniversario de Ayotzinapa.*

*Un estudio comparado en titulares y  
fotografías de la prensa internacional*

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On the first anniversary of the disappearance of 43 students in Ayotzinapa, several community-based organizations coordinated a series of events that culminated with a large march in Mexico City on September 26, 2015. This paper presents a comparative analysis of the manner in which this march was constructed in the headlines and principal photographs of nine newspapers with significant histories as political actors in their respective countries: Mexico, Argentina, Brazil, Spain, France, the United States, and the United Kingdom.

**KEYWORDS:** Ayotzinapa, journalistic discourse, global media, protest marches, social mobilization.

*Al cumplirse el primer aniversario de la desaparición de 43 estudiantes en Ayotzinapa, varias asociaciones populares convocaron a una serie de actividades que culminarían con una gran marcha en la Ciudad de México el 26 de septiembre de 2015. En este trabajo se presenta un análisis comparado de la forma en que se construyó este acontecimiento en titulares y fotografías principales de nueve diarios con amplia trayectoria como actores políticos en sus respectivos países: México, Argentina, Brasil, España, Estados Unidos, Francia y Gran Bretaña.*

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Ayotzinapa, discurso periodístico, prensa global, marchas de protesta, movilización social.

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## INTRODUCTION

In September of 2014, the municipal police of Iguala, Guerrero pursued and attacked a group of students from the *Escuela Normal Rural Isidro Burgos* [Isidro Burgos Rural Teachers College] in Ayotzinapa, resulting in the death of 9 individuals, over 20 persons injured, and 43 students still missing. Now, over four years after these events, no satisfactory explanations have been given regarding the whereabouts of the missing students or the people responsible for this crime, with serious political consequences affecting the national and international image and credibility of the government of Mexico.

On the first anniversary of the massacre, several community-based organizations, in support of the Committee of Parents of the 43 students, coordinated a series of protest activities that would take place on September 26, 2015 and which would culminate in a large march from *Los Pinos*, the then official residence of the President, to the main square of Mexico City; protests in other states and countries were also planned. This social, national, and international mobilization was largely organized through social networks; it was not a coincidence that this one-year anniversary was called the Day of Indignation, in allusion to the so-called Movement of the Indignated Ones, or the 15-M movement, a citizen mobilization in Spain that arose in 2011 which would have subsequent impact in other countries such as the Occupy Movement or YoSoy132, in a clear expression of the power of digital mobilization.

The first section of this work justifies its comparative methodology and gives an explanation as to why a central element in the analysis of the digital media, with its potential for global consumption, is its political role, as the digital media lends visibility to various social movements and, in this case, to one of their most prominent material expressions: protest marches. The second section presents the criteria for the construction of the corpus obtained, i.e. articles expressly referring to the march in nine newspapers, three of which were published in Mexico: *El Universal*, *Excélsior* and *La Jornada*; three in America: *The New York Times* (United States), *El Clarín* (Argentina), and *O Globo* (Brazil); and three in Europe: *El País* (Spain), *The*

*Guardian* (United Kingdom), and *Le Monde* (France). In all cases, analysis was focused on the headline and the principal photograph, in consideration of the fact that these parts of the article, particularly those that appear on the front page of printed newspapers, represent a permanent, fixed, and prominent public discourse, and they are vital in the formation of public opinion. The third section contains the results of the comparative analysis of the manner in which the march was reported. Although the march attracted media attention at the global level, its political nature was softened by multimodal discourse strategies (syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic) which placed importance on the emotional aspect, invisibilizing the march and presenting it as a mobilization limited to Mexico, or reporting it as an episode that was merely commemorative in nature.

#### WHAT TO EXPECT FROM THE COMPARISON OF DIFFERENT NEWSPAPERS

As Hallin and Mancini (2004) point out, comparative analysis of the media sensitizes the analyst to variation and to similarity. While globalization leads to convergence between journalistic orientations and tendencies, there are substantive differences among media outlets that are determined by their respective national systems (Hanitzsch, 2009, p. 413); this is true even for media intended for global consumption. Comparative analysis provides evidence that cultures cannot be understood as communities with homogeneous values, but rather as hybrids involving traditional elements that interact dynamically with international elements (Oller & Barredo, 2013, p. 10).

In the era of transnationalization, comparative studies have great potential (Esser, 2013, p. 113) because they allow analysts to contrast the naive universalism and the ethnocentrism that lead some researchers to assume that what occurs in their own country is replicated in other countries, with the better understanding of their own systems gained when they juxtapose their familiar structures with those of others. This perspective can guide attention towards structures that are taken for granted and not sufficiently reflected upon. There is a growing consensus that it is no longer possible to study one phenomenon in one

country without asking whether it is common throughout the world or whether it is distinctive to that specific context (Esser & Hanitzsch, 2012, p. 3).

Presently, digital technologies, which significantly facilitate access to different media collections, make it easier to conduct comparative studies; however, they also make these studies more complex, since digital journalistic discourse combines more elements of construction of meaning than newspapers printed on paper, such as moving images, interaction with users, hypertexts, among other elements. It should be kept in mind that the headline and the principal photograph largely orient these elements, which are precisely the elements on which this analysis is focused.

In the comparison of the manner in which the newspapers from various countries represented the march through the articles' headlines and photographs (including photo captions), many elements were available, so that it could be determined whether the march was framed as part of a social movement not only in Mexico but international in scope, or whether the article was merely exploiting the media interest in Ayotzinapa. As Melucci warns (2010, p. 80), one of the problems to which social movements are exposed is the permanent risk of fragmentation. It is not sufficient that a newspaper should report a march or an act of protest in order to make known its major or minor interest in the social causes that provoked the protest; media interest does not necessarily translate into greater political commitment.

Thus, it was important to determine whether the march was understood as a singular episode, as a collective movement on a public road intended to produce a political effect through the peaceful expression of an opinion or claim (Favre, 1990, p. 15), or whether it was conceived as a social movement in which different individuals and groups came together to protest against a common grievance; that is, to determine if they were merely "masses," or if this collective movement throughout Mexico City was protagonized by "a powerful and suspicious actor on the political stage" (Sloterdijk, 2009, p. 12); whether or not this march was recognized, as proposed by Tilly (2010), "as a counterweight to oppressive power, as a summons to popular action against a wide range of scourges" (p. 20).

A march is not completed at the time of its occurrence; its resonance in the media contributes to the expansion, reinforcement, or even the reversal of its symbolic effectiveness. As noted by Rodríguez Saldaña (2008, p. 11): “Every march projects a message intended to persuade potential allies, obligate the adversary, and capture the attention of the media”. The way in which information is constructed is far from innocent; rather, this is a *mise-en-scène* that tends to “conform to the relevance criteria imposed by the media, which is a priority recipient even if the coverage is in many cases unfavorable to the demonstrators” (Rodríguez Saldaña, 2010, p. 97). Hence, this *mise-en-scène* could have been represented as a commemoration, as an expression of outrage, as support for the cause of the parents of the 43 students, or as a display of rejection of government inaction (not only regarding those missing in Ayotzinapa, but also the thousands of dead and missing people in Mexico in recent years). Finally, an essential factor in the global media should be borne in mind: “Information that quickly travels around the world has every possibility of reaching audiences whose political, cultural, and religious choices threaten to enter into conflict with it, and, consequently, to reject it” (Wolton, 2004, p. 43). This provided added interest in the comparative analysis of the headlines and the photographs.

#### CRITERIA FOR THE FORMATION OF THE CORPUS AND GENERAL ANALYTICAL METHODOLOGY

In order to define the corpus, the first step was to select three relevant newspapers in Mexico that were variously located across the national political spectrum and that, despite their adaptation to the new technological era, conserved a strong presence as printed media in addition to being published in their digital versions; with these criteria *El Universal*, *Excélsior*, and *La Jornada* were selected, in all of which the article on the march appeared on the front page.

So that the reader may be provided with the specific reasons for these choices, it should be mentioned that *El Universal*, the oldest Mexican newspaper (founded in 1916), despite the fact that its information and editorial line have generally been consistent with the stance of the

groups in power, has frequently been a platform for different political voices, although this plurality has often been motivated by commercial interests. The history of *Excelsior* (created in 1917) is one of peaks and valleys: it became the most important newspaper in Mexico and was a protagonist in emblematic events in the history of journalism in Mexico, such as the 1976 dismissal of Julio Scherer, its director, which marked an iconic moment of rupture between the press and the government; after several years of financial distress and public disrepute, it has once again become a medium with some influence over public opinion and a strong tendency to favor the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* [Institutional Revolutionary Party]. Finally, *La Jornada* (founded in 1984) tends to be seen as a center-left newspaper, mainly for having supported popular causes on several occasions.

For this analysis were selected international media outlets with recognized political involvement in their countries, and that, in addition to being published in printed form, were available for consultation in digital versions. In order to consider a broad geographical perspective and political spectrum, three media outlets published in America and three published in Europe that had reported information expressly related to the march were chosen. Thus, *El Clarín*, *O Globo*, *The New York Times*, *El País*, *The Guardian*, and *Le Monde* were included in the corpus. The brief information provided below regarding the newspapers was obtained from the respective website of each publication.

*El Clarín*: Founded in Buenos Aires in 1945, its purpose is to be a mass-distribution and quality newspaper. It has become one of the newspapers with the largest circulation in the Spanish-speaking world. It has embraced technological developments, to reach its audiences through new platforms and channels (Grupo Clarin, 2016).

*O Globo*: Founded in 1925, it is self-described as a newspaper concerned not only with reporting the important facts, but also with doing so quickly; it is presently a vital media outlet that publishes the essential daily news, be they local community manifestations or major events that impact society and cause changes in the country and in the world (*O globo*, 2011).

*The New York Times*: Founded in 1851, it is published in New York City and distributed in the United States and other countries. Its main objective is to cover the news as impartially as possible, and to treat its readers, sources, advertisers and others in a fair and open manner. In addition to its daily version, there is an international version (*International New York Times*, originally *International Herald Tribune*), as well as a Spanish version, with a selection of content previously published in English (*New York Times*, s.f.).

*Le Monde*: Founded in 1944, it is considered one of the most important newspapers in France. Its purpose is to provide quality, accurate, verified, and balanced information. Its journalists must take a critical look at information and echo the pluralism of opinions (*Le Monde*, 2010).

*El País*: Founded in 1976, when Spain began the transition to democracy, it is the Spanish newspaper with the greatest circulation and influence. It is self-described as a global, independent, quality newspaper that is an advocate for democracy. It was the first Spanish newspaper to adopt journalistic standards such as the “Style Guide,” the role of the “Reader’s Advocate,” and the “Editorial Statute.” It has correspondents in most European capitals and almost all Latin American countries (*El País*, s.f.).

*The Guardian*: Founded in Manchester in 1821, it moved to London in 1964. Its history involves several political episodes, such as having contributed to the fall of the British Conservative Party in 1997. In 2011, it was named newspaper of the year due to its association with WikiLeaks. In recent years it has significantly developed and expanded its range of digital products and services (*The Guardian*, s.f.).

As with journalistic discourse, the corpus includes, multimodally, three main elements of meaning: linguistic, semiotic, and graphic; as proposed by Kress & Van Leeuwen (1998, p. 187), written text is not only structured by linguistic means, verbal connectors, or other cohesive mechanisms, but rather writing increasingly depends on the design, the layout of blocks of text, photographs, and other graphic elements. Currently, digital newspapers, more so than print media, are

multimodally structured, i.e., they simultaneously employ a range of representational and communicational modes (Kress, Leite-García & Van Leewuen, 2000, p. 374).

Throughout the process of reading, analysis, interpretation, and comparison of journalistic materials, it is essential to consider them as discursive events, as social practices that maintain a dialectic relationship with the situations, institutions, and structures in which they are produced: the discursive event is shaped by them, but it also shapes them (Fairclough & Wodak, 2000, p. 367). According to Mouchon (1999, p. 44): “To question the linguistic production of the journalist in his or her relationship with reality is essential, since the information product is defined when the discourse that will represent reality is chosen”. Let us see, then, what is the reality that was represented with regard to the march for the one-year anniversary of the events that took place in Ayotzinapa.

## RESULTS OF THE JOURNALISTIC DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

The media collection was made up of ten articles published in nine newspapers,<sup>3</sup> from which the headlines and photographs were taken for corpus analysis. These headlines and photographs constitute the corpus. The first step in the comparative analysis was to identify the specific location of the article in the newspaper, considering that this choice represents a component of meaning: being the main article on the front page or the first article displayed when the digital version of a newspaper is opened places importance on the article even before it is read. To this end, the reading path or sequence followed by an everyday reader was traced; some researchers identify this sequence as the top-down model of reading; that is, perception of the text begins with its global aspects in order to successively process the most basic levels to the most complex levels (Godínez, 2014, p. 56).

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<sup>3</sup> In the case of *The New York Times* (hereinafter *NYT*), the present study included not only the version of the article published in English on the day of the march, but also the translation into Spanish in the “América” section two days later (September 28).

FIGURE 1  
FRONT PAGES OF THE THREE MEXICAN NEWSPAPERS



Note: The circle on the front page of *Excelsior* shows the location of the box containing a jump line to the story on the march.

The march was reported on the printed front page of all three Mexican newspapers; in fact, it was the main article in *El Universal* and *La Jornada*, while in the third newspaper, *Excelsior*, the story still appeared on the front page, but it was published on the lower half of the page in a box inviting the readers to see the full story on inside pages (see Figure 1). While the six international newspapers consulted in this study (*El Clarín*, *O Globo*, *El País*, *NYT*, *Le Monde*, and *The Guardian*) are still published in paper versions, only the digital versions were analyzed, not only for practical reasons but also because these materials would contain interesting empirical evidence in terms of a comparative perspective, as they are intended for a more global public than the printed newspapers (see Table 1, which contains the headlines in the original language along with professional translations into English).

In two of the headlines, the third person plural is used: “Thousands march” (1a and 1j); this lexical choice makes the mobilization less visible, as it presents the demonstration as a group of people who are

merely moving forward. The march as a materialization of an act of protest was evident only in the headline of *La Jornada* (1b): “Thousands *protest* in Mexico and around the world one year after Iguala”. In two other headlines (1h and 1e), rhetorical constructions that convey the idea of marching were chosen: “Mexico hits the streets” and “Crowd takes the streets”. In the first of these, the headline of *El País*, no purpose for the taking of public space is presented; only the temporal circumstance is given: “on the anniversary of the Iguala tragedy”. The second of these, that of *O Globo*, does indicate a purpose for the taking of the streets: “to press for answers on 43 missing students”.

TABLE 1  
HEADLINES OF THE CORPUS ARTICLES

Newspaper	Headline	English translation
a) <i>El Universal</i> (Mexico)	Miles <b>marchan en paz</b> por los 43 normalistas	Thousands <b>march in peace</b> for the 43 student teachers
b) <i>La Jornada</i> (Mexico)	<b>Protestan</b> miles en México y el mundo a un año de Iguala	Thousands <b>protest</b> in Mexico and around the world one year after Iguala
c) <i>Excélsior</i> (Mexico)	Ya no les vamos a creer: padres de los 43	Parents of the 43: We will believe you no longer
d) <i>El Clarín</i> (Argentina)	Masivas marchas en México a un año de la desaparición de los 43 estudiantes	Massive marches in Mexico one year after the disappearance of the 43 students
e) <i>O Globo</i> (Brazil)	Multidão <b>vai às ruas</b> da Cidade do México <b>pedir solução</b> para sumiço de 43 estudantes	Crowd <b>takes the streets</b> of Mexico City <b>to press for answers</b> on 43 missing students
f) <i>The New York Times</i> (USA)	Against Odds, <b>Seeking Hope</b> for Mexican Students Who Vanished a Year Ago	
g) <i>The New York Times</i> (Spanish Edition)	Entre la indignación y la esperanza <b>conmemoran</b> las desapariciones en México	The disappearances in Mexico <b>were commemorated</b> with a mixture of outrage and hope

Newspaper	Headline	English translation
h) <i>El País</i> (Spain)	México <b>sale a la calle</b> en el aniversario de la tragedia de Iguala	Mexico <b>hits the streets</b> on the anniversary of the Iguala tragedy
i) <i>Le Monde</i> (France)	Manifestations au Mexique, un an après la mort des 43 étudiants du Guerrero	Demonstrations in Mexico, one year after the death of the 43 students from Guerrero
j) <i>The Guardian</i> (United Kingdom)	Thousands <b>march</b> in Mexico City to mark year since 43 students disappeared	

Source: Own elaboration.

A comparison of the lexical choices in the English and Spanish versions of the *NYT*, two completely different syntactic constructions, leads to interesting reflections. In both cases the subject is omitted (this characteristic, as discussed below, was common to almost all of the headlines). In the English version, published on the day of the march (1f), the action attributed to those who marched was “Seeking Hope”; the passive nuance implicit in this expression is further reinforced by the adverbial phrase that precedes it (“Against Odds”). It would seem that the march was considered a lost cause before it began. Two days later, the passivity implied in the discourse construction is reinforced; in the Spanish version (1g) the march is semanticized as a *commemoration* or remembrance of a past event: “The disappearances in Mexico *were commemorated* with a mixture of outrage and hope”.

Two headlines (1d and 1i) were constructed as phrases (i.e. without a verb). Despite the very high lexical similarity between the two headlines (“Massive marches in Mexico one year after the disappearance of the 43 students”; “Demonstrations in Mexico, one year after the death of the 43 students from Guerrero”), it is important to analyze their differences. Thus, according to the Argentine newspaper, *El Clarín*, the marches were “massive” while *Le Monde* reported them as mere “demonstrations”. In *El Clarín*, which is published in a geographical context closer to that of Mexico, the matter of the 43 students continued to be treated as a “disappearance”, while the French newspaper reported it as “death”. Efforts, albeit symbolic, have been and are still being

made, mostly by the public, to counter this latter version (a widely-repeated slogan has been “they were taken alive, and we want them back alive” [vivos se los llevaron, vivos los queremos]).

A final difference also speaks of a greater geographical proximity (and thus a higher pragmatic level) of the Argentine newspaper compared to the French publication: the inclusion by the former newspaper of the definite article “the” (“the disappearance of the 43 students”) alludes to a fact that is assumed to be known. The French publication includes the state in which the events occurred (“the 43 students from Guerrero”), which provides better geographic context for non-Mexican readers, since Iguala or Ayotzinapa might have been vague references. In both cases these headlines essentially refer to the occurrence of the marches, without adding any information about their purpose.

As for the seven headlines constructed as complete sentences, two of them (the *NYT* versions in English and Spanish) omitted the grammatical subject (1f and 1g), which invisibilizes the people who marched. Later, in the analysis of the photographs corresponding to the articles, this invisibilization of the participants will become even more evident.

Three of the five remaining headlines (1a, 1b, and 1j) use the subject “thousands”, with no description of the characteristics of these thousands of individuals. Incidentally, the major discrepancies regarding the number of protesters should be noted; this issue is relevant to journalistic discourse in terms of greater or lesser importance attributed to a march; in this case, the number reported fluctuated between “Thousands in Mexico and around the world” (*La Jornada*), “tens of thousands” (*El País*), “at least 50,000” (*NYT*), and “some fifteen thousand” (*El Universal* and *Excelsior*), these latter two citing the government of Mexico City as the source.

There are significant differences among the three cases regarding the manner in which the march is modalized; the headline of *El Universal* reads “march in peace”; this delimitation becomes important in the Mexican context because it supposes the presence of civilized protesters, not violent activists; the latter description tends to be a common manner in which individuals who take part in political

mobilizations are characterized. *La Jornada* was the only publication in which the headline reflected the combative nature of the march in its headline (“Protestan”), as well as the international repercussion of this mobilization in the organization of similar marches in other parts of the world.

With regard to this national or international characterization of the march by the newspapers, five of the six international publications confined it to Mexico (*El Clarín*, *El País*, *O Globo*, *NYT*, and *The Guardian*), as did the Mexican newspaper *Excélsior*. As for the three newspapers that made reference to the international solidarity of this movement, two are Mexican (*El Universal* and *La Jornada*) and one is international (*Le Monde*). It is relevant to cite some of the text published by *Le Monde* in the body of its article, as it indicates the international resonance in at least four countries (highlighting its own resonance in the first instance): “*Quelques rassemblements ont également eu lieu en France, en Espagne, en Argentine et aux Etats-Unis* [Protests also took place in France, Spain, Argentina, and the United States].” Even when the sample comprised the articles from these three latter countries (Spain, Argentina, and the United States), none of them mentioned the demonstrations in support of Ayotzinapa that had taken place in their own countries, constructing the march as a mobilization limited to Mexico.

Finally, the Mexican newspaper *Excélsior*, clearly aligned with the Mexican government, was the only outlet to construct a headline using a direct speech: “Parents of the 43: We will believe you no longer”. In this discursive construction, the march is completely invisible (this also occurred with the photographs, discussed below), and the theme of the information presented is the rebellious attitude of the “parents of the 43”. With respect to the pragmatic level of the information presented, the 43 students or student teachers, as they are called in all of the other corpus headlines that refer to them, are also invisibilized (1a, 1d, 1e, 1i, and 1j). It should be mentioned that direct speech such as that of the headline in the article printed in *Excélsior* can be used in the media as a strategy to ridicule or single out a social actor on the basis of his or her statements (Salgado Andrade, 2009, p. 171).

## ANALYSIS OF THE PRINCIPAL PHOTOGRAPHS

The corpus also included the main photographs corresponding to the articles. In several of the newspapers two or more photographs were published, and four included photo galleries or videos (*La Jornada, El Universal, El País, and Excélsior*). For the newspapers that published more than one photograph, the order of placement was considered an element of construction of meaning; thus, it was the photograph that appeared on the front page or at the top of the digital version that was analyzed. The results presented here were produced through the critical observation of each photograph; according to Pericot (2002), as with written discourse, visual information is perceived on a syntactic level (What is shown?), a semantic level (What is the relationship between what is shown and the world as we perceive it?), and a pragmatic level (What is the meaning of what is shown based on the relationships between the signs and their interpreters?). In addition, Kress & Van Leeuwen (1996, p. 2), write that "...visual structures point to particular interpretations of experience and forms of social interaction". Thus, their meanings are determined by the cultural context in which they arise, not by specific semiotic systems.

Five of the nine photographs show the demonstrators advancing (*El Clarín, El Universal, Le Monde, O Globo, and El País*). The order in which the newspapers are listed reflects, in descending order, the number of protesters who, judging by the pictures, took part in the march.

Thus, while both *El Clarín* and *El Universal* published photographs depicting a long avenue full of demonstrators, the former (probably taken from a higher location) presents an image of a larger section of the avenue on which the contingents marched, showing greater participation in the demonstration. As if the image were not enough, the massive nature of the participation is reinforced with the photo caption: "*Protesta. Masiva marcha en la capital mexicana. [Protest. Massive march in the Mexican capital]*". It is interesting that this image prominently features a poster with the figure of the revolutionary leader Emiliano Zapata, with the well-known slogan "Tierra y Libertad [Land and Freedom]", in reference to a mobilization to denounce the

ecocide perpetrated in Xochicuautla, a rural area in the State of Mexico. Consequently, this visual information reflects the fact that in the global imaginary there is a clear association between the image of Emiliano Zapata and mass mobilizations in Mexico.

FIGURE 2

PROTEST. MASSIVE MARCH IN THE MEXICAN CAPITAL (*EL CLARÍN*)



Source: *El Clarín* (2015).

*El Universal*, in addition to displaying a smaller section of the avenues on which the protesters were marching, includes a photo caption that tends to decrease the perception of the number of protesters, as it marks a clear separation between those who were marching and those who were observing: “*La marcha por la indignación nacional recibió apoyo de ciudadanos que se detuvieron a los costados del Paseo de la Reforma* [The march for the national outrage received support from citizens who stopped along the sides of Paseo de la Reforma]”. In both cases, posters are shown with the faces and names of the missing students, or with the number “43” or the word “Ayotzinapa,” all of which have become highly symbolic references to the event.

The third image, which also shows the advancing march, appeared in *Le Monde*; one feature that distinguishes it from other photographs of the corpus is the absence of symbolic elements representing the events that took place at Ayotzinapa. It is a panoramic shot of a large group in which no sign or banner alluding to the subject of Ayotzinapa can be

FIGURE 3  
THOUSANDS MARCH IN PEACE FOR THE  
43 STUDENT TEACHERS (*EL UNIVERSAL*)



Source: *El Universal* (2015).

FIGURE 4  
MEXICO CITY, SEPTEMBER 26, 2015 (*LE MONDE*)



Source: *Le Monde* (2015).

seen. The photo caption is also generalized: “*A Mexico, le 26 septembre 2015 [Mexico, September 26, 2015]*”.

The next photograph appeared in *O Globo*. One characteristic that distinguishes it from the previous photographs is that the foreground is occupied by posters showing photographs of the 43 missing students. The photo caption highlights the combative nature of the march, as well as the leadership in the march of the parents and relatives: “*Revolta. Pais e familiares dos desaparecidos lideram a manifestação carregando*

*cartazes com fotografias dos fillos* [Outrage. Parents and relatives of the missing students lead the demonstration, carrying posters with photos of their children]”. All of the posters have a similar design: the photograph of one of the missing students and the words “*¡Vivo se lo llevaron! ¡Con vida lo queremos!* [He was taken alive! We want him back alive!]” Thus, this was not only an act of mourning, but also a demand, albeit symbolic, that the disappearances be explained and that they not go unpunished.

FIGURE 5

REVOLT. PARENTS AND FAMILY OF THE MISSING STUDENTS LEAD THE MARCH CARRYING POSTERS WITH PHOTOGRAPHS OF THEIR SONS (*O GLOBO*)



Source: *O Globo* (2015).

In the digital edition of *El País*, which, as mentioned above, included a video, the photograph that appears once the corresponding article is displayed and which functions as an inbound link, shows posters with drawings of the young men’s faces, without showing full photographs that would display the facial expressions of the demonstrators carrying them: the photo caption succinctly describes the event as a “*Manifestación por los estudiantes desaparecidos* [Demonstration for the missing students]”.

FIGURE 6  
 DEMONSTRATION FOR THE MISSING STUDENTS (*EL PAÍS*)



Source: *El País* (2015).

The photographs published in *La Jornada* and *Excélsior* allude to the amount of protestors with which the march concluded in the main square of Mexico City. However, they show two completely different realities.

In *La Jornada* there is a visual construction whose elements make it highly symbolic: a large grouping of umbrellas (used by the protestors against the rain which was falling incessantly), at the center of which a sign is held up displaying the emblematic number 43, and in the background, there are protestors on a stage holding posters showing the faces of the young men. In the extensive photo caption, many of the cities that joined this movement are mentioned.

In contrast, *Excélsior*, which as noted in the analysis of its headline, invisibilized the march on its front page, showed a panoramic image of the main square at half capacity; this photograph does not indicate why the people, who were photographed at a long distance, were gathered together in the square. There is no photo caption, and the text that appears under the photo, although it protagonizes the parents of the student teachers, does not allow for the recognition of any poster or face.

FIGURE 7  
WE WILL FIGHT UNTIL WE FIND THEM (*LA JORNADA*)



Source: *La Jornada* (2015).

FIGURE 8  
PARENTS OF THE 43: WE WILL BELIEVE YOU NO LONGER (*EXCÉLSIOR*)



**Ya no les vamos a creer: padres de los 43**



Con la participación de unos 15 mil manifestantes, según datos del GDF, la marcha por la "indignación" recorrió avenidas de la capital del país. En el Zócalo capitalino, padres de los 43 normalistas desaparecidos dijeron que no dejarán a las instituciones "imponer su verdad histórica" y que ya no les van a creer.

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Source: *Excélsior* (2015).

Finally, two of the photographs show isolated individuals, with clear differences as to the meaning of their inclusion.

*The Guardian* presents the face of a young female student with the emblematic number 43 on her face; the photo caption reads: “Students and relatives of the 43 missing students from Ayotzinapa take part during a protest in Mexico City, on Saturday.” It should be mentioned that the text only refers to two types of actors: students and relatives of the 43 missing students.

The *NYT* article featured a medium-shot photograph of Ezequiel Mora; the photo caption indicates that his son Alejandro was among the 43 missing students and the article notes that the body of Alejandro was the only body located and identified. The father is shown alone, against a brick wall background, and he appears to be looking up at the sky, perhaps reaffirming what is stated in the article: “*Como católico, Ezequiel Mora debatía qué tipo de misa ofrecer para su hijo de 21 años* [As a Catholic, Ezequiel Mora debated what kind of mass to offer

FIGURE 9  
STUDENTS AND RELATIVES OF THE 43 MISSING STUDENTS FROM  
AYOTZINAPA TEKE PART DURING A PROTEST IN MEXICO CITY,  
ON SATURDAY (*THE GUARDIAN*)



Source: *The Guardian* (2015).

FIGURE 10

EZEQUIEL MORA, WHOSE SON, ALEXANDER, WAS AMONG 43 STUDENTS WHO WENT MISSING A YEAR AGO. THE BODY OF ONLY ONE OF THE STUDENTS HAS BEEN IDENTIFIED (*NEW YORK TIMES*)



Source: *New York Times* (2015).

for his 21-year-old son]...”. The isolation in which this father and his dilemma were framed brings to mind the words of Sloterdijk (2009, p. 14): “In the environment of bourgeois situations a relentless system is created, defined by the creation of distances between the subjects; this system isolates the individuals from each other, and directs each one of them towards the solitary effort of having to become themselves”.

This is not a novel manner of framing an article regarding a widespread social mobilization, in which the combat or protest is subsumed by emotions; as suggested by Pfetsch & Esser (2012, p. 31): “There is high anticipatory pressure ... to be responsive to public sentiments and ‘market’ their messages accordingly [...] Here we can discern persuasive effects on attitudes, responses to emotional appeals, and cognitive effects [...]”.

A significant visual addition to the Spanish version of the article was the incorporation of a second photograph, besides that of Ezequiel Mora (which appears first). This photograph was a shot of the march, in which

FIGURA 11  
 EL SÁBADO, MILES DE PERSONAS MARCHARON POR LA  
 CIUDAD DE MÉXICO PARA RECORDAR A LOS 43 ESTUDIANTES QUE  
 DESAPARECIERON HACE UN AÑO EN EL ESTADO DE GUERRERO  
 (NEW YORK TIMES)



Fuente: *New York Times* (2015).

the foreground (occupying nearly the entire bottom half of the photo) displayed the flag of Mexico, on which the coat of arms was replaced by the slogan “*NOS FALTAN 43* [43 OF US ARE MISSING]”. The combative nature of the image, however, is softened by the description given in the photo caption, according to which thousands of people marched to *remember* the 43 missing students. Nevertheless, this image was only presented to Hispanic readers.

Finally, we include an overview of how the march was presented in each of the newspapers, integrating the main components of analysis (headline, photograph, photo caption, and subheads).

For *El Universal* this march produced clear journalistic interest, judging by its prominent placement (main article published on the day following the march). The large presence and the peaceful nature of the march were the elements most clearly shown; however, its massive

nature was minimized by the citation in the body of the article of the estimates of the Government of Mexico City (only 15 000 people); similarly, the power of the mobilizing contingent was undervalued, as the photo caption indicated that not all those shown in the photograph were protesters who had attended *ex profeso*, since there was also “support from citizens who stopped along the sides of Paseo de la Reforma.”

In *La Jornada*, the most remarkable aspect was the international support, as this was the only headline of the sample that referred to the protests in Mexico and the rest of the world. The uprising was not shown as an act of remembrance or passive contemplation, but rather a protest, framed, incidentally, by other protest movements.

*Excélsior* placed the article on the march in the lower section of the front page, the main headline of which (“Jails saturated with inmates with drug convictions”) was reporting a fact that could even serve as an argument that was attempted to be used in official sources, claiming that the 43 young students disappeared as a result of their connections to drug trafficking.

As for the Latin American newspapers, *El Clarín* reflected a greater proximity to highly expressive symbolic elements in Mexico and the rest of the world, judging by the inclusion of a poster with Emiliano Zapata as a notable visual element in the photograph. However, no interest was shown in joining the community of its Spanish-speaking readers, because no allusion was made to the resonance in other countries, rather only “within the country”. Furthermore, Enrique Peña Nieto, one of the persons most strongly challenged during the march regarding the actors responsible for the tragic events, came off very well in the subheads: “*El presidente Peña Nieto se comprometió a resolver el brutal crimen* [President Peña Nieto has committed to solving this brutal crime]”.

Brazil’s *O Globo* reported the active role of the protestors, who came out not only to march, but also “to press for answers” regarding the disappearance of the students, whose faces were shown on posters in the foreground of the main photograph. However, *O Globo*’s support of this democratic cause did not include a reference to mobilizations in other countries, confining the event to Mexico.

*The New York Times* neatly employed a common strategy used in order to disassemble the possibilities of collective protests. Coverage was given to the subject, but it was confined to a personal tragedy, a heartbreaking tale of a father with grey hair and a sad face, looking upwards as if in resignation.

With regard to the European newspapers, *El País* showed the march as an event already known to the public, devoting extensive information to it, including a photo gallery. However, although the article alluded to the subject of the outrage and the suspicions regarding the lack of clarity in the investigation of this crime, this newspaper did not mention the expression of solidarity in other countries, including that which took place in the same country in which *El País* is published.

*The Guardian* placed visual emphasis on the strong symbolism of the number “43,” prominently publishing the face of a young woman with the emblematic figure painted on her cheek. Using direct speech as a strategy, a message was constructed, inviting Mexican readers to take heed: “Protester says the latest demonstration ‘sets an example for all Mexicans to wake up and not be silent’”. However, the solidarity of the media did not cross any borders, and the march was conceived as a strictly national episode.

Finally, *Le Monde*, which in its headline reported that the march had caused a wide international sensation and represented a serious blow to the credibility of the Government of Peña Nieto, qualified the students as dead and not missing; however, it also neutralized the progress visually, by publishing an image tersely captioned: “Mexico, September 26, 2015”.

## CONCLUSIONS

The present analysis has revealed that, at various geographical points, knowledge of the events at Ayotzinapa has travelled the world and generated a set of highly symbolic references, especially the invocation of “the missing 43”. However, in the corresponding journalistic discourse, information about the protest mobilization was treated with caution. Thus, six of the nine newspapers published the story as an issue affecting Mexico, with no mention of the support for this cause

in other countries; the Day of Indignation was mainly relegated to a national mobilization by these media outlets. In other newspapers, the story framed the march as a mournful tribute, as a commemoration held in order to remember the students, and the social mobilization was minimized. A generalization of those who marched (only “thousands” as a noun) was also observed, in which ironically the number reported tended to be smaller in Mexico, since the tens of thousands or the 50 000 reported in the *NYT*, *Le Monde*, and *El País* were reduced to 15 000 or 18 000 by two of the three local media outlets.

In the set of headlines and principal photographs studied, several discursive strategies were utilized to report the march without conceiving it as a social mobilization: reducing the protest to the emotional ordeal of one of the parents of the missing students (as reported in the *NYT*); invisibilizing the protesters, the parents, and the students (as done on the front page of *Excelsior*); or reporting the march as a commemorative funeral procession (as reported in *Le Monde*).

The use of all of these mechanisms, by which a political mobilization became a peaceful, sterile, emotional, invisible, commemorative, or mournful episode in response to ignominious past events (without bringing those responsible to trial), should not come as a surprise. After all, newspapers occupy a place of privilege; their commitment to support democratic causes cannot be subject to an even greater interest that has to do with their commercial nature. According to Chomsky (2007, p. 20): “The major media –particularly, the elite media that set the agenda that others generally follow– are corporations “selling” privileged audiences to other businesses. It would hardly come as a surprise if the picture of the world they present were to reflect the perspectives and interests of the sellers, the buyers, and the product”.

The dead and missing in Mexico, as it certainly occurs in other countries, is an undeniable topic of journalistic interest, but it cannot rise to the level of a confrontation, neither open or subtle, with the groups in power. The present comparative analysis brought to light some mechanisms used in order to neutralize the political potential of the information: reporting the march as a topic of journalistic importance, but diminishing its capacity for mobilization; confining it to a commemoration of an episode that had already taken place for

which resignation should be expected in the best of cases; or exploiting the emotional aspect of the issue, offering condolences for suffering, and treating the events as a social drama, a family tragedy (for the parents of the 43 students), or even as a purely individual dilemma. All of this came to light in a comparative analysis of a corpus of newspapers whose headlines and photographs, as it is done in this age of digital journalism, were designed for different audiences in different countries and languages.

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