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Mexico: tracing opportunities for Peace

ICIP

SUMARI

INTRODUCTION

Mexico: tracing opportunities for Peace

ICIP
International Catalan Institute for Peace

Several countries in Latin America are currently experiencing high and intense levels of violence despite the fact that they are not undergoing (or are no longer undergoing) armed conflict in the classical sense of the expression. With their local idiosyncrasies, it is usually a violence that combines poverty and exclusion with high levels of aggression, threats against life and physical integrity and an accumulation of human rights violations. Thus the development of a dignified life project – both on an individual and a collective level – becomes increasingly difficult or impossible. Behind this violence there are public, private, local and international actors, whose actions are facilitated by a climate of impunity and corruption. The consequences of neoliberal economic policies and a deep-rooted sexist culture are also factors that contribute to this situation of violence.

As an institution dedicated to the promotion and building of peace, we at ICIP consider that it is necessary to deepen the analysis of these multidimensional or plural situations of violence and of the strategies to reverse them. Public prevention policies must be monitored and this must be done from a pacifist and feminist perspective, i.e. by putting life, care, human dignity, coexistence, equal opportunities and non-discrimination at the center. We also believe it is necessary to give visibility to and to value social mechanisms of resilience, as well as the courageous citizen initiatives of peaceful resistance to the factors of violence, the struggle for human rights, and the defense of territory and social fabric in these complex and dangerous contexts.

Mexico is one of the most paradigmatic of the countries affected by violence. The figures are alarming: according to official data, 33,753 people were murdered in Mexico

in 2018. That is more deaths than those caused by warfare in countries like Yemen or Afghanistan [1]. More deaths than the total amount of deaths in terrorist attacks worldwide [2]. And to the number of victims of intentional homicide one must add the more than 40,000 enforced disappearances as well as an enormous range of other human rights violations. The overlap of common crime, organized crime, corruption, impunity and abuses by the security forces fuels the suffocating situation of insecurity in many areas of the country.

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Other Latin American countries have rates of violence that are equal to or even higher than those in many parts of Mexico. However, in Mexico there are a series of factors conducive to social, political and cultural responses that surpass policies based on securitization.

The change in political discourse is one of them. Indeed, President Andrés Manuel López Obrador, elected a little over a year ago, distanced himself from the belligerent line of his predecessors in his electoral campaign and referred, albeit confusingly and perhaps precipitously, to transitional justice measures. At the beginning of his term, in January 2019, he said that the war on drug trafficking was over. Although this has not yet resulted in a reduction in the levels of violence or a decisive commitment to the demilitarization of public security, an evolution towards a paradigm that is more favorable to social welfare can be perceived.

Another fundamental transformative potential that Mexico has is the great capacity to mobilize and advocate of a restless and vibrant civil society and a highly qualified, critical academia. Human rights organizations, communities affected by violence and many academic institutions continue working on and producing sustainable proposals

for peacebuilding, with the understanding that peacebuilding is not simply a matter of security.

“ This publication has been prepared within the framework of the First International Forum for Peacebuilding in Mexico, which will take place on 25-27 September in Barcelona ”

The peacebuilding alternatives developed in Mexico can be a great inspiration to create these new instruments and strategies in many other parts of the world. To face the challenge of this violence, diagnoses are needed that address the complexity of these dynamics and the responsibilities of the various actors involved. New instruments and strategies are needed to transform these “new” conflicts that go beyond a pacification based on the imposition of armed security. Peace cannot be imposed by coercion, threats and the use of force.

This publication has been prepared within the framework of the First International Forum for Peacebuilding in Mexico, which will take place on 25-27 September 2019 in Barcelona. This is an activity jointly organized by Serapaz, Taula per Mèxic and ICIP with the aim of giving visibility, analyzing and discussing the opportunities and efforts that exist today in Mexico to reduce the rates of violence, create conditions that lead to progress in healthy coexistence and strengthen a culture of peace. The texts presented here are intended to provide points for debate.

In the introductory article, Alberto Solís, director of the NGO Serapaz, takes a critical look at the first months of President López Obrador’s term, highlighting certain opportunities for social transformation as well as the significant and persistent shortcomings that impede real change. According to the author, more than peacekeeping measures based on order and security, what the country needs is a comprehensive peacebuilding strategy.

Some of the most innovative proposals compared to the policies of previous governments have to do with the introduction of concepts of transitional justice. But how should we understand transitional justice in a context like Mexico's? Where is the country going and where is it coming from? Which of the many mechanisms that transitional justice has to offer would be applicable? And what mistakes that generate false expectations or distort the meaning of justice should be avoided? Cristián Correa, of the International Center for Transitional Justice, offers us good ideas on the subject.

“ The peacebuilding alternatives developed in Mexico can be a great inspiration to create these new instruments and strategies in many other parts of the world ”

Next we propose three articles dedicated to groups that are not only particularly affected by violence, but are also key actors in the denunciation and prevention of violence and the formulation of peaceful transformative proposals: women, youth and indigenous peoples and communities.

In the first one, the researcher and representative of Taula per Mèxic, Sonia Herrera, reminds us that in addition to focusing on the experience of women facing conflict and violence, these women must be included in the design and implementation of measures against violence in accordance with the spirit of Resolution 1325 of the United Nations Security Council. She also stresses that it is necessary “to rethink the very concept of security as a whole, putting life and the ethics of care at the center, from the backlands and the borders, and from the perspective of non-hegemonic feminisms.”

Then Alicia Reynoso, psychologist and student activist, explains how Mexican youth have gone from a certain political indifference to becoming very concerned about the situation of extreme violence that the country is experiencing. She adds that they have begun organizing – at universities and other places – to create spaces of resistance and

transformation. In this sense, social networks have proved essential to increasing awareness, outrage and mobilization.

“ Our recognition to all the human rights and environmental advocates, community leaders and journalists who put their lives in danger so that today we can propose paths for the building of a just and durable peace in Mexico ”

Francisco López Bárcenas, renowned professor, researcher and advisor to indigenous communities, explains in the ensuing article how the situation of violence affects these populations, which also have to face the impact of an extractivist economic model that endangers the environment in their territories and distorts social relations in their communities. In the face of these adversities, indigenous groups have been able to develop peaceful actions of resistance and defense of Mother Earth.

In this monograph we also wanted to refer to migrants, who are harshly persecuted and criminalized in Mexico, especially as a result of the pressure being exerted by the current US administration and the rising xenophobia in this and other regions of the world. In contrast and as an educational experience, we must highlight the incredible solidarity with migrants shown by many Mexicans in response to the hostile conditions that these people face when trying to reach the US border. We have also found it interesting to include Pietro Ameglio’s view of the caravans that are formed with this objective. This Latin American leader in nonviolent civil resistance presents these marches as nonviolent collective actions of protest.

For the last article we asked Gloria Abarca, PhD in Peace, Conflict and Development Studies and a primary and secondary school teacher, to explain how the culture of peace is also a tool for social transformation in Mexico. In this sense, peace education actions prove to be absolutely necessary despite all the challenges they entail in contexts so drastically marked by violence. The author delves into the issue through

concrete examples of training in peace education in which she herself has played an active role.

“ ”

It is a pleasure to include in the present issue of the journal *Peace in Progress* an interview with Nashieli Ramírez, president of the Human Rights Commission of Mexico City and a long-standing human rights activist. She draws our attention to how violence specifically affects children and adolescents, a particularly vulnerable group that requires more visibility and specific protection measures. We also had the opportunity to talk with her about actions carried out by several Mexican institutions aimed at moving forward on the road to building peace.

Finally, in this monograph you will find a brief recommendation of resources that we have considered of interest in order to delve a little deeper into the issues addressed in the various articles. The amount of materials (including books, reports, documentaries, analyses, artwork, webpages, etc.) that exist on the situation of violence in Mexico is such that we have not been able to include them all. The fact that they do not appear in this modest compilation does not mean that we do not appreciate their quality and usefulness.

From ICIP we would like to sincerely thank all the authors and other people who, with their ideas, advice, editing, translations, revisions and layout, have made this publication possible. We would also like to express our recognition to all the human rights and environmental advocates, community leaders and journalists who put their lives in danger so that today we can propose paths for the building of a just and durable peace in Mexico.

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Photography #CaravanaMX of Peace

Pacification and peace building in Mexico

Alberto Solís Castro
Executive Director of SERAPAZ

More than a year has gone by since Mexico's last presidential elections. Those elections were preceded by historical levels of violence, with both 2017[1] and 2018[2] being years with the most homicides ever recorded in the country. They were also the elections with the highest number of candidate assassinations on record. Even in this context, people went to the polls massively, voting on the basis that they were sick and tired of the traditional parties that had been ruling until then at both federal and local levels. The election results were a sign of a desire for a change in the prevailing situation of inequality, violence and corruption in the country. The security strategy adopted 12 years ago in the fight against organised crime provided another indicator of the unsustainable nature of Mexico's current path[3].

Thus Andrés Manuel López Obrador won the presidency of Mexico with the support of more than 50% of the electorate, on his third attempt at running for the position. With a relatively new party, he managed to build alliances with different groups belonging to the traditional political class, important members of other political parties and the evangelical leaders congregated in the also recently created Social Encounter Party. This coalition was constructed around López Obrador figure, his image and his leadership. He therefore began his term in office with extremely favourable political conditions and an absolute majority in both chambers of the Mexican federal Congress as well as in most of the local legislatures.

López Obrador brings to his presidency a political project that includes objectives and a discourse of struggle against corruption and social inequality, but also with proposals that have been put into question because of their insufficient differentiation from the lines laid down by previous governments. In fact, he also begins his time in office with an confrontation, evident throughout his campaign, with a civil society whose

organisations and representatives he identifies as political adversaries, locating and highlighting among them only entrepreneurs and opinion leaders who question his forms of political action.

In short, he arrives with the possibility of a broad control of the state apparatus and with social backing from a population that believes it is possible to take the country in a different direction and willing to give him majority support. However, the president's agenda and proposals are not directed towards the transformation of the structural conditions that generate the inequality and violence that currently plague Mexico, but rather towards changing political conditions around his highly concentrated prophet-like leadership and the naming of officials in whom he has personal confidence.

" The new presidency of Mexico has presented peace as a concept linked to security, as a negative peace, the opposite of violence and a state of war. "

The administration's policy on the issue of peace, like others, has suffered the fate of becoming "tougher," and once again puts matters in the hands of political figures who enjoy the president's personal confidence. These tendencies are similar to measures generated by previous governments facing the deterioration of state institutions and the complexity of the Mexican context.

Peace has been presented as a concept constantly linked to physical security by the new administration[4]. This relationship, pairing peace and security, makes us think of a negative conception of peace; as the opposite of violence, but with a focus on physical violence. That is to say, a peace that contrasts with a state of war and which is conceived of as a negation of war, based on the imposition of order by the security forces.

Following this same logic, just after his election victory, the president launched an initiative from the Secretariat of Security and Civilian Protection called “Listening Forums for Peace and Reconciliation”. Here, the administration hoped to attract different voices to build a strategy to confront the situation of violence in the country, on the basis of forums open to public participation in different parts of the Republic. However, as these sessions were held, Mexican civil society expressed strong criticisms of the process, such as: the requirement that the Secretariat of Security be the coordinator of this initiative; the last-minute nature of the invitation made to the Mexican population; the lack of coordination with academic experts and specialised organisations; and the concentration on open assemblies held with little preparation and generalised opinions that would be difficult to systematise.

It was pointed out several times that the term “pacification” was inadequate as it expressed precisely an idea of apeace imposed by order and state forces, but this was never rectified. The results of the exercise did not offer solutions to the issue. The absence of a clear proposal to respond to the situation of violence in the country became increasingly evident and the degree of collusion within the police forces was shown to be much higher than had previously been imagined.

These results generated a new impetus for the creation of the National Guard (GN) and furthered the conceptualization of this new body as a collaboration with military forces under military command, despite the fact that the Secretary of Public Security himself, appointed by the government elect, spoke in favour of halting this campaign proposal only a few weeks after the election. This was due to the outdated nature of the constitutional framework within which the National Guard was conceived, which followed a nineteenth-century model of civil society collaboration with the Armed Forces to face up to a possible foreign invasion. Faced with the complexity of the situation and the lack of alternative proposals, the government opted, as its predecessors had done, to modify the constitutional framework in order to give legal backing to the Armed Forces in carrying out public security activities, ignoring the declarations issued against these measures by numerous national and international human rights bodies and organisations.

“ The vision of peace must take into account the conditions of access to truth and justice, of democratic participation, of respect for human rights, of dignified living conditions ”

With the president’s large majorities in local and federal congresses, this constitutional reform was approved, but not without provoking opposition from human rights organisations, mainly grouped in the “Security Without War” collective. And when these thought that they had achieved at least one major breakthrough by modifying the terms of the top command of the National Guard, obtaining the support of the opposition in the Senate for this to be civil and not military, the president proposed a different interpretation of what had been approved in the reform and announced the appointment of an active military officer, in the process of retirement, as the head of the GN.

Therefore, it was that the GN began to operate and deploy in various parts of the country, even before the approval of the secondary laws and protocols of action that govern it. After the resolution of tensions with Trump administration over the issue of migration and its threat to impose tariffs on Mexico, the GN was then deployed massively to enforce the detention of migrants on the southern border of the United States.

The tendencies towards increasing violence across the country have not changed either. The first three months of this year have been the most violent on record[5] and 2019 could break the record again to become the most violent year ever. A more comprehensive and integrated analysis of the subject of peace building must necessarily go beyond its relationship with security issues and must concentrate on building conditions for access to truth and justice, democratic participation in a broad sense, and respect for human rights, as well as underlining the importance of guarantees of access to decent living conditions that allow all people to live freely and develop to their full potential. With the National Guard as the focus in regards to peace

building, this has not happened.

It is nevertheless important to underline that within López Obrador team we find very diverse and even contradictory positions and political trajectories. Some of them have much greater empathy and relationship with the demands raised by civil society in support of the struggle for human rights. In this sense, we can see important advances. For example, in the paradigmatic case of Ayotzinapa, where progress was made in the design and creation of the Presidential Commission for the Investigation of the Truth in this case with the participation of the relatives of the victims, the representative organisations and international experts. Likewise, the discourse on this topic has changed substantially, now recognising the emergency and the dimension of enforced disappearances in Mexico. Since the transition period there has also been constant dialogue with different groups of victims, many of them grouped in the Movement for Our Disappeared in Mexico (Movimiento por Nuestros Desaparecidos en México). This movement, since its creation, has managed to design proposals for the creation of the General Law on the Forced Disappearance of Persons. Now it works to ensure that the law is implemented adequately, prioritising the work of searching for and identifying disappeared people.

“ The tendencies towards a deepening of violence have not changed and 2019 could break the record again to become the most violent year ever ”

The discourse against neoliberal economic policies has been an important part of the political orientation of this government. However, the promotion of the economy continues to be based on investment in massive infrastructure projects with grave environmental impact in territories with a significant presence of indigenous and rural communities, particularly in the southeast of the country. It is in this region where the construction of the so-called Mayan Train has been announced, a project with a significant impact on the environment and on the living conditions of the communities

in that territory. The administration also plans to build the Trans-Isthmic train in a geopolitically strategic zone, and the Dos Bocas Tabasco refinery, which is part of a commitment to an economy that will continue to be oil-dependent without clear projects for alternative energy.

The processes for the advancement and definition of such projects have been shown to be extremely limited in terms of public participation and consultation, particularly with respect to consultations with indigenous people which are not carried out systematically for all projects, regardless of the government's interest in their being executed. Nor have the referendums held complied in any way with international standards, and towns and cities have been included in them that are not directly affected by the project in question. This has generated confrontation and social polarisation within indigenous communities, sometimes with fatal effects such as in the case of the Morelos Integral Project, where, after the President had publicly criticised the population resisting the project and after the imposition of a consultation with less than two weeks notice, one of the opposition leaders was assassinated in front of his house, just four days before the referendum.

On the other hand, in the matter ofindigenous and Afro-Mexican peoples a Constitutional Reform has been promoted that seeks to change the conception of their relationship with the Mexican state. This reform would be based on the recognition of key elements of these cultures, such as legal systems and the concept of collective territory, among many other pending issues that are part of the historical debt that is owed to these populations. The largest sum ever will be dedicated to the promotion of social support programs, with direct resources for broad sectors of the population. To achieve this, a set of measures has been proposed with significant cuts in the bureaucracy, including salary reductions for top officials, but also dismissing workers, in a program of cuts that is paradoxically typical of neoliberal states. In addition, these social programs seem to be directed at strengthening a clientelist relationship with the population, while leaving in place the challenge of reducing the gap of inequality and marginalisation; this could have the effect of generating divisions within community bodies of self-organisation and social resistance, as well as the risks involved in the widespread distribution of resources in the context of extreme violence that a large part of the country is living through.

“ We must move towards a notion of peace construction that focuses on the recovery of social relations, the transformation of structures and the reach of all those conditions that allow a healthy and plural coexistence with equity and justice ”

In terms of law enforcement, it is easy to coincide with the catastrophic vision presented by the Attorney General of the Republic in his report on the first 100 days of the institution’s activity; however, it is similar many aspects to what his predecessors –then named General Prosecutors– had pointed out and the orientation of his work seems to be more focused on carrying forward the investigation of big cases than on a transition and deep transformation of the federal justice prosecution system and institutions.

The issue of migration is going through one of its gravest crises ever with the current promotion of a policy of arresting and criminalising both the migrant population and those who defend their human rights. The situation for human rights advocates and journalists across the country has continued to worsen with at least 20 murders so far during the current government’s period in office and a government protection mechanism that has serious deficiencies. Clearly, this administration’s policies regarding this issue are insufficient, failing to promote an integral protection program to give coherence to all the efforts required in this matter.

Meanwhile, civil society’s relationship with the president is not improving. Not only because of the continuous insults he has directed at them, but because of his general contempt for the technical arguments that put into question any of the decisions he has made which reflect a voluntarist desire to insist on achieving his goals. The attitude of the multiple and varied left social movements has been diverse, from those who have decided to join or collaborate in an optimistic vision of the possibilities of

change, to those –like the Zapatista Army of National Liberation, the National Indigenous Congress and the Indigenous Council of Government– that have already presented a clear position of resistance and of distancing themselves from the new government. There is also a wide range of intermediate positions among civil organisations that, in their work, combine at the same time a critical relationship and coming closer over different issues.

From the perspective of peace-building and conflict transformation, I am convinced that the change of government, with the transcendence of objectives such as those that have been outlined, opens up important opportunities for historic demands that are essential to achieving real peace. However, it will be necessary to promote a project with a comprehensive vision of this concept, which unifies in a consistent and achievable manner all its components towards a notion of peace-building that focuses on recovering social relations, transforming structures and including all those conditions that permit a healthy and plural coexistence with equity and justice, beyond the impetus of isolated initiatives which aim to re-establish a peacemaking order around a concentrated charismatic leadership and the good will of its collaborators. Having the ability to influence things, to take advantage of the possibilities opened by this context, is an important challenge that is open to those of us who, from different realms and fronts of struggle, continue to believe in and commit ourselves to building that attainable, just and lasting peace.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Alberto Solís is a human rights defender in Mexico and currently the executive director of SERAPAZ (Services and Consulting for Peace, A.C). Specialised in consulting and strategic political support for social movements and organisations in favour of the positive transformation of conflicts and the promotion of legitimate and just causes of civil society.

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This is a translated version of the article originally published in Spanish.

Photography Andrés Manuel López Obrador rally

Transitional justice in Mexico?

Cristián Correa
Senior Associate at the International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ)

Since the election as president of Andrés Manuel López Obrador in July 2018 there have been countless debates and proposals about implementing transitional justice in Mexico. The initial announcements of pacification –talking about amnesties and truth commissions, and a social approach to the fight against crime that dealt with its socioeconomic causes instead of repressive strategies– generated confusion. They also even provoked hostility among some victims and participants in hastily organised forums. Civil society organisations with a long record of defending human rights and academic circles joined the debate, trying to formulate proposals. However, as became clear in the last months of 2018, this dialogue had very limited results given the lack of clarity of what had been announced by the then president-elect.

The imprecision of the announcements, the particular nature of the violence that affects Mexico, and a history of mistrust between the state and civil society have all made it difficult to define a coherent policy that responds to the need for security and justice. Part of this confusion has been created by the use of the concept of transitional justice, a notion that is open to different interpretations and can easily be manipulated.

Context and legacy of violence in Mexico

The degree and intensity of violence in Mexico exceeds anything one would expect in a society that supposedly is not involved in an internal armed conflict, has democratic institutions and has a long republican tradition. The causes of this violence vary in each region, but they originate from a combination of organised crime and the actions of state agents, whether at the municipal, state or federal level. The lines of separation between them are diffuse, since the networks of corruption of organised crime and state agents are obscure, given the lack of adequate judicial investigations. Indeed, the

levels of impunity are putting into question the existence of the rule of law in many parts of the country, where public prosecutors and the police have very little credibility.

However, this situation is not entirely new. The figures for homicides and human trafficking have undoubtedly increased massively over the last ten years, but they were also high in the 1990s. To this one must add a history of state repression, massacres and enforced disappearances, such as the massacre of students in Tlatelolco in 1968, the so-called dirty war, and disappearances carried out in the 1970s. The clear up rates and application of justice in these cases have been practically zero, despite the creation in 2002 of a Special Prosecutor's Office for Social and Political Movements of the Past.

A frequent complaint among victims and civil society focuses on the inability of prosecutors, at the state and federal levels, to investigate these crimes, which adds to their lack of autonomy. Some accuse these institutions of having cultures of indifference and neglect, particularly in relation to victims who are poor. The evidence of impunity seems to support these critical opinions. This is in contrast with the official legal guarantees, particularly with the framework of the Constitution, celebrated as one of the most advanced in its recognition of the rights of victims. The chasm between the declared norms and their effectiveness is disconcerting and seriously affects the credibility of the democratic system.

“ The pressure from victims' movements and civil society for substantial changes in the face of the high rates of homicide, impunity and disappearances has led to several reforms ”

In recent years, different movements of victims and civil society have pushed for more substantial changes, first in response to the massive number of cases of kidnappings and extortion; then in reaction to the high rates of homicide and impunity and, later, to the large number of disappearances. These movements have given rise to several reforms, some of which actively involve civil society and victims' organisations, such as

the General Law of Victims; the General Law to Prevent, Investigate and Punish Torture; the General Law on the Enforced Disappearance of Persons; and the replacement of the Attorney General's Office (PGR) by a General Prosecutor's Office of the Republic (FGR). These changes preceded President López's campaign, and the norms and institutions created bring significant opportunities. However, the greatest opportunity lies in the accumulated experience of organisation, activism and ability to exert influence reflected in these reforms, and which will be necessary to continue moving forward.

An iconic case that contributed to this process is the strong reaction generated by the forced disappearance of 43 students in Ayotzinapa in 2014, followed by the massive clamour and international pressure in the face of the absence of effective investigations. However, the visibility of this case should not overshadow the broader process described above. The case has undoubtedly helped to give strength to a movement that demands truth and justice, but that "should cover the 40,000 disappeared, and not just the 43", as different organisations demanded during the visit of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in April 2019.

The position of President López Obrador before this situation has been ambivalent. The campaign promise to return the soldiers to their barracks and to professionalise the police was abandoned days before assuming the presidency, in the light of the fragile security situation and the need to count on the support of the armed forces. The commitment gave rise to the creation of a National Guard: this was to be headed by a civilian, but a retired army general was put in charge.

Relevance of experiences of transitional justice in this context

Is transitional justice useful in this context? One of the first debates that arose within civil society concerned the definition of the transition: whether the election of a president who broke the two-party system of the PRI and the PAN could be described as such, or if we were talking about a continuation of the unfinished transition initiated by President Fox in 2000, after 71 years of domination by the PRI. To this confusion was added the use of language of reconciliation and amnesty that seemed to many victims a new name for the historic impunity. The use of references to Colombia, where the peace agreements contain amnesty provisions, significant reduction of sentences and

alternative sanctions, was not justified in a situation where organised crime has no political motivation nor incentives for demobilising. For these reasons, it is highly advisable to avoid the language of transitional justice that generates such confusions. This does not preclude taking into account different experiences of transitional justice insofar as they offer useful lessons, particularly for their capacity to respond to massive or systemic crimes, in contexts of the fragility of institutions.

“ How can one respond to the need for justice in a context of massive violations, with insufficient or restricted power, limited capacity and resources, and institutions committed to impunity? ”

The first consideration is to remember that transitional justice is not a discipline in itself with a rigid framework, but rather emerges from very concrete experiences. First from fairly defined transitions between dictatorships and democracies in contexts such as Argentina, Chile, Eastern Europe and South Africa, and then in post-conflict situations, such as Guatemala, El Salvador, East Timor, Peru, Sierra Leone and Colombia [1]. These are diverse experiences, which respond to different contexts and conditions of power, resources, social organisation and institutional capacity[2].

It is important to examine the first experiences, implemented before these notions had been transformed into dogma, because in those it is clear that what they were trying to do was not apply a “model”, but rather to resolve in some way the dilemmas between the demand for justice and the political and institutional capacity to achieve it. This requires us to pose questions like those formulated in these countries. How can one respond to the need for justice –understood in a broad sense, not limited to but including criminal justice– in a context of massive violations? How can one do that with insufficient or restricted power, limited capacity and resources, and institutions committed to impunity? The complementarity of truth, justice, reparation and

guarantees of non-repetition arises later. These points help us to examine different aspects, but they can not be considered a straitjacket, neither that it is imperative to implement these processes all at once. Precisely in these countries the successful experiences are those that take into account the balance between what is asked for and what can be guaranteed.

The contribution of transitional justice in Mexico should not necessarily be in identifying what the transition is, nor in defining the period that a truth commission should cover. Nor can it be based exclusively on the creation of institutions –this is a country with a history of large institutions, replicated in each state and with limited effectiveness– or in issuing new legal norms which are very exacting, but which have scarce application and have proven to offer limited accessibility to victims. Its contribution should start from asking what is the truth that Mexico needs to clarify and recognise. The country and its democratic institutions must ask themselves what are the lessons that must be drawn from so much violence and impunity. It is also necessary to define what form of justice can guarantee non-repetition and strengthen the rule of law, when existing institutions have systematically failed to offer justice. In matters of reparations, the authorities must ask themselves what are the consequences of the most serious violations committed and how to respond to them to ensure that all the victims of those violations have access to sufficient but feasible forms of reparation. Finally, the country and its authorities should not simply establish new institutions or approve new laws, but answer the question about what mechanisms should be established to ensure that these levels of violence and complicity do not continue. These questions must be formulated while recognising the history of the persistence of violence and impunity, limited resources, and the other priorities of the country, which include overcoming poverty and widespread marginality. The contribution of experiences of transitional justice should not be to replicate the institutions that these experiences have created in other contexts, but to formulate these questions with a sufficient dose of realism.

Strategies to carry the process forwards

The need to be realistic doesn’t mean not being ambitious. It means taking advantage of the opportunities and prioritising those that can lead to steps forward in the short

term. These steps forward can help win support and create confidence both among victims and among the general population in the possibility of gradually demolishing the structures of impunity, but without pretending that this can be done at a stroke. It is crucial to examine the opportunities and see which of them can open up new possibilities. Some have already been identified by civil society organisations, and these can undoubtedly be key partners for the Government, to the extent that both parties are willing to listen to each other and collaborate.

One of the opportunities is the political support that exists for the search of missing persons, strengthened following the visit of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. The National Search Commission now has leadership, political support and resources on a scale that it never had before, and is backed up by a strongly organised community of victims. The task is enormous and immensely complicated. However, the possibilities exist of offering some concrete results in certain less complex identification processes, while at the same time initiating a broader plan of identifications. These particular results and the existence of a plan could increase the pressure to do justice in these cases. The determination of patterns of disappearances, making it possible to identify the institutions, criminal organisations and authorities that may be involved, could help to generate the level of indignation and even public anger that societies need in order to advance towards more profound changes, particularly in matters of justice.

A second opportunity is the widespread disappointment with the Executive Committee for the Attention of Victims (CEAV) and the discredit of a reparations policy designed without a clear awareness of its limitations in capacity and resources. Paradoxically, this situation could serve to explore a different reparations system, restricted to the most serious violations and without distinction of state or federal jurisdiction or geographical location, but without affecting the acquired rights or expectations of reparation created by the General Law of Victims. This would imply the creation of a parallel program, implemented through a separate team within CEAV, that would record, in a simplified form and for the sole purpose of this new program, the direct victims and their closest relatives in cases of grave violations, such as death, disappearance, serious sexual violence, torture, trafficking of persons and serious incapacitating injuries. This program could consist in a series of standardised measures common to each category, as has been proposed by the coalition of civil society organisations

working on this issue. This would allow a significant group of victims to begin receiving concrete forms of reparation within two years, while at the same time restoring the prestige of CEAV and of the state.

“ In Mexico, the challenge is in how mechanisms against impunity can generate a transition. Advances should focus on obtaining results that respond to the rights and demands of the victims, on strengthening the capacity to respond of the State and civil society, and on generating greater backing from the population ”

Other opportunities require further exploration, such as the formation of a team to analyse the archives of the Centre for Investigation and National Security (CISEN) as a source of information for the search process, judicial investigations and a gradual process of clarification of patterns of violations and of the truth. At some point, the vetting process for National Guard personnel could be subjected to revision, so that complaints about the possible participation in human rights violations or abuses of power by candidates would put into question their suitability. In this, the files of the National Human Rights Commission and the information in the hands of civil society organisations could be useful. The standards for this would not need to be the same as for criminal investigations, since the only consequence would be the exclusion from forming part of that body. Finally, the transformation of the PGR into the FGR could be an opportunity to establish a team specialised in methods of investigation by patterns, focusing not on clearing up countless individual crimes but rather on identifying criminal networks and large scale criminal plans. That could make it possible to identify those responsible within the illicit networks, including the direct leaders but also the financial and political operators that form part of them. The dismantling of some of these networks could give confidence to the population and give lessons that

would improve the capacity to investigate and to make the best use of investigative resources. Such investigations could make victims feel that the response to their rights is not limited to the search for their relatives or to modest reparations, but also effective justice, and that the dismantling of such organisations will diminish the possibilities of such violations continuing.

These possible strategies could lead to excessive expectations. It should be noted that things will not be easy. One of the lessons of the processes of transitional justice is the tendency of systems of impunity just to adapt themselves, to resist changes and to stall. Perhaps the conditions do not exist to do everything that needs to be done, so a start must be made with policies that not only generate tangible progress, but also produce results that permit advances in new processes of truth, justice and reparations. In a case such as Mexico, in which there is no transition, the challenge is how the mechanisms against impunity can generate, precisely, a transition. The steps forward should aim at obtaining results that respond to the rights and demands of a significant number of victims; also at strengthening the capacity to respond of the state and civil society, and in generating greater support from the population. That requires, on the side of state institutions, not only efficiency, but also maintaining a frank and constant dialogue with the various victims' organisations and keeping the doors open to suggestions and to monitoring by a civil society. Conversely, human rights and victim organizations should take the risk of becoming involved in solutions that are perhaps less than perfect, but are feasible and may be able to generate the conditions for future advances. It requires, however, the greatest responsibility from the government, which, in turn, must take the initiative and lead a process based on consultation, listening to victims and civil society, and taking their rights seriously.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Cristián Correa is a lawyer with experience in the definition and implementation of transitional justice and on reparation policies for massive violations of human rights at the International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ), where he is a senior associate. From the ICTJ he has offered advice in different countries, such as Peru, Ivory Coast, Sierra Leone, Kenya, Colombia, Nepal and East Timor. Previously he was the legal secretary of Chile's National Commission on Political Imprisonment and Torture, and worked in the Ministry of the Interior and in the Presidency of the Republic, coordinating

the implementation of reparation policies and providing advice on human rights policies.

1. Other post-dictatorship experiences refer to Morocco, Brazil and Tunisia, while Kenya is a particular case that combines authoritarianism with political violence.

2. See Roger Duthie and Paul Seils (eds.), Justice Mosaics: How Context Shapes Transitional Justice in Fractured Societies (International Center for Transitional Justice, New York, 2017), and particularly Roger Duthie, Introduction, 8-39.

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Fotografia Manifest for the disappearance of 43 students from the Raúl Isidro Burgos Rural Normal School in Ayotzinapa (Mexico)

Depatriarchalise and embody security and peace in Mexico

Sonia Herrera Sánchez
Researcher and Doctor in Audiovisual Communication and Advertising

With the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security now nearly 19 years old, there is an inescapable need to broaden the traditional vision that we have inherited against militarism and war –even from feminist movements– and focus on those forms of violence that occur outside situations of war but whose effects on the civilian population are equally devastating in the short, medium and long term.

We can find a paradigmatic case of such situations of violence that are not considered to be war under common international law –"wars not formally waged between States", in the words of the anthropologist Rita Laura Segato[1]– in Mexico. This is a country where, according to Índice de Paz (Peace Index), in 2018 the homicide rate increased by 14%, with more than 27 deaths per 100,000 people (69.4% of these homicides were committed with a firearm) and where currently ten feminicides are committed each day, according to the data collected by the Map of Feminicides in Mexico created in 2016 by the geophysicist María Salguero. In a context of extreme violence, the rates of feminicide, sexual violence and sexist violence in general increase exponentially.

It is worth recalling here, as an example, a report by Amnesty International, International Action Network On Small Arms and Oxfam International in 2005 which analysed the effects of firearms on the lives of women. The report stated the following:

"Guns affect women's lives when they are not directly in the firing line. Women become the main breadwinners and primary carers when male relatives are killed, injured or disabled by gun violence. Women are displaced and forced to flee their homes for an uncertain future. Displaced women often face starvation and disease as they struggle to

fend for their families. And women, like men, are caught in the crossfire, both in times of war and of peace"[2].

" In a context of extreme violence, the rates of feminicide, sexual violence and sexist violence in general increase exponentially "

Thus, in 2006, Felipe Calderón, candidate for the National Action Party (PAN), held the Mexican presidency following elections judged fraudulent by broad sectors of society. One of his campaign promises was to put a stop to violence and drug trafficking. As the spearhead of his strategy, he deployed more than 25,000 soldiers and federal police officers throughout the territory. Far from being the solution, this strategy of militarisation led to an unprecedented increase in violence that has claimed the lives of thousands of people, many of them civilians.

The journalist Marcela Turati wrote that the situation that Mexico went through over the last decade was characterised by "wholesale death"[3]. Meanwhile the writer from northern Mexico, Carlos Velázquez, quotes in his novel *El karma de vivir al norte* these words from David Simon, screenwriter and creator of the HBO series *The Wire*, which summarise very accurately the current situation in Mexico: "What the drugs themselves have not destroyed, the warfare against them has. And what once began, perhaps, as a battle against dangerous substances long ago transformed itself into a venal war on our underclass"[4].

While all this was happening, the "narconation" and the "narco-state" were consolidating and normalising themselves as a fundamental part of the political practice and social evolution of Mexico. Narcoculture, as a material expression of the concept of *gore capitalism*[5] coined by the philosopher Sayak Valencia, laid the foundations of a hypersexist, hyperconsumerist and hyperviolent system, a "capitalism based on drug trafficking, on profiting from death and on the sexist construction of gender"[6] intimately linked to two other fundamental concepts related to this topic:

necropolitics, as a dystopian form of governance, and feminicide, as a materialisation of this, coercive language and performative and exemplary praxis exerted on the bodies of women to show us that our lives are not simply vulnerable and precarious, but also something expendable that can be objectified and dehumanised.

Thus through the spectacularisation and hyperrepresentation of violence, narcoculture filtered into all fields of knowledge and popular culture of Mexico as well as into the daily practices of the population, as a matrix of intelligibility of social reality and as the point of reference, the model and the possibility of rising socially, despite its having taken our freedom. Meanwhile, necropolitics –that is, the idea that "the ultimate expression of sovereignty resides, to a large degree, in the power and the capacity to dictate who may live and who must die"[7]– took its place in Mexico's presidential throne, pushing aside any public policy that dared to place life in the centre, at the same time as it demanded a monopoly of violence and "power over the individual body and over the body of the population"[8] fighting with organised crime groups over the power to oppress.

" Narcoculture has filtered into all fields of knowledge and popular culture of Mexico as well as into the daily practices of the population, through the spectacularisation and hyperrepresentation of violence "

In this sense, Valencia[9] explains that "life is no longer important in itself but rather for its market value as an object of monetary exchange. The result of this transformation is that what is valuable is the power to control decisions over the death of others" and that "this necropolitical practice is taking over Mexican state power by means of controlling its economy, given the dependence of this economy on the economy of crime".

Given the reality described so far, it is essential from a feminist perspective to ask ourselves how the combination of narcoculture, necropolitics and what Segato calls the "pedagogy of cruelty" constructs patriarchal societies that extrapolate the notions of conquest and plunder brought to us by the epistemologies of the south, to apply them to the bodies of all those "subaltern" subjects that fall outside the ideal of the white, bourgeois, western and heterosexual man, and especially to poor and racialised women.

The final expression of the "exclusion" of these bodies located on the frontier, beyond the margins of "acceptable normality", we find in feminicide, understanding this not only as a state crime, by action and omission, that violates the human rights of women –as argued by various authors such as Marcela Lagarde, Rosa-Linda Fregoso, Celia Cheyenne Verite or Jane Caputi, among others– but as the ultimate consequence of inequality in gender relations and of male control over bodies and of the "social construction of these hate crimes, the culmination of gender violence against women, as well as the impunity that surrounds them"[10].

Reinforcing this idea, although in the 1970s, Michel Foucault explained in his essay *Discipline and punish: birth of the prison* that "the body is invested with relations of power and domination"[11]. In the case of women, these power relations are built on "a logic of the domination of bodies by force and by sexualised and gender based violence"[12].

" To challenge the notion of security based on arms and violence and move on to a true culture of peace, it will be necessary to depatriarchalise these concepts and their associated practices "

Therefore, if we think about the feminist strategies to be followed to address the challenges we face in terms of security and peacebuilding in Mexico, we must demand not only the inclusion of women's experience in the face of conflict and violence around their bodies, but a rethinking of the very concept of security as a whole, putting life and the ethics of care at the centre, from the peripheries and the frontiers, from non-

hegemonic feminisms; also touching on dimensions such as language or visuality, so as to deconstruct the collective image built around the patriarchal concept of security, which is founded on a colonial, western and violent logic.

But to challenge that notion of security, strongly based on arms and violence and on new forms of permanent parastatal warfare, and thus to move from an imminent process of pacification to a true culture of peace, it will be necessary to depatriarchalise these very concepts and their associated practices since, as Segato argues, "the pedagogy of masculinity is what makes war possible and no true peace is possible without a gender peace"[13].

To do this we must aim to construct new subjectivities that take advantage of the potential of collective action and of the community spirit, politicising the caring "for all bodies in their diversity"[14] as a tool of resistance, understanding it not as a traditionally feminised activity, but as a necessarily human ethic that, as Irene Comins-Mingol affirms, is "a source for overcoming adversity, of resilience, not only through the strength of ties and the commitment to the daily activities necessary for the sustainability of life"[15], but through participation in collective activity where pain and experience are socialised and narrated, thus inevitably leading to their being recognised, and where we can resignify ourselves as agents of social transformation.

In this sense, the collective work *Cuidado, comunidad y común.Experiencias cooperativas en el sostenimiento de la vida* ("Care, community and the commons. Cooperative experiences in maintaining life") includes the following:

"The attack on our sisters who today defend their territories highlights the crucial role they play in placing human and natural reproduction at the centre, revealing that the logic of extraction is not limited to the exploitation of work but also includes expulsion and annihilation. As Olga Araujo explains, the recovery of knowledge and memories for healing and reparation brings up a set of female experiences and methodologies against war, violence and displacement"[16].

“ The feminist strategy, then, is to mainstream a culture of peace and a feminist education that allow us to decolonise knowledge and minds and to reinvent power ”

Within this recovery of knowledge we find Lorena Cabnal’s idea of *acuerpamiento*, which she describes as “the personal and collective action of our indignant bodies in the face of the injustices of other bodies. Self-mobilisation to obtain the political energy to resist and act against the multiple oppressions of patriarchy, colonialism, racism and capitalism. This *acuerpamiento* generates emotional and spiritual energies and breaks through the impositions of time and boundaries. It provides us with closeness and collective indignation but also revitalisation and new energy, so as to recover our happiness without losing our indignation”[17].

Undoubtedly, the task is overwhelming, but it’s what has to be done. To the peacemaking philosophy left to us by our beloved teacher Vicent Martínez Guzmán and to the practices of denunciation and dialogue carried out for decades by anti-militarist women’s groups such as Women in Black, Code Pink or the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), among many other pacifist feminist movements, now it is urgent to incorporate the dismantling of the patriarchal system and its alliance with neoliberalism, on the basis of the *acuerpamiento* of the suffering and the vulnerability of others and, particularly, of other women.

Only in this way can g-local processes and policies be initiated so as to tackle the devastating effects that the new wars are having on women; effects that in Mexico, the perfect laboratory of gore capitalism, are shown up in what Segato calls “the pillage against the feminine” and which, in turn, manifests itself “both in unprecedented forms of bodily destruction, and in the forms of trafficking and commercialisation of what these bodies can offer, to their utmost extent”[18].

The feminist strategy, then, is to mainstream a culture of peace and a feminist education that allow us, paraphrasing Boaventura de Sousa Santos, to decolonise knowledge and minds and to reinvent power, generating a counterhegemonic culture that allows us to glimpse an idea of security connected with life and caring and not with the permanent fear of their potential destruction.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Doctor in Audiovisual Communication and Advertising and a specialist in educommunication, peace journalism and feminist media analysis, with special emphasis on the representation of sexist violence and feminicide. Teaches Feminist Theory on the Master's Degree in Gender and Communication, and Gender and Sexual and Reproductive Health on the Master's Degree in International Health and Cooperation at the Autonomous University of Barcelona, as well as being a tutor in the area of Feminisms and Sexual Diversity on the Bachelor's Degree in Social Education at the Open University of Catalonia. Independent researcher and member of the Taula per Mèxic (Platform for Mexico).

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Indigenous peoples and communities, violence and alternatives of peace

Francisco López Bárcenas
Professor, researcher and adviser to indigenous communities

The continuous stream of violent social events shortens the people's memory. Of important things that occurred, only a blurred image remains, if that, because their place in the popular memory is occupied by other more recent events. Seeing the Dantesque scenes that death has left across the whole territory of Mexico, turning the country into an involuntary cemetery, there are few, very few, who understand what is happening and even less those who think that the violence is not the will of God, that the situation that Mexicans are going through is a product of the decomposition of society and that if we want to escape from it we have to retrace our steps, undo much of the route we've followed, in order to find a way forward.

This is very important among the indigenous peoples and communities of the country. Exclusion due to discrimination and racism has established asymmetric relations between them and the mestizo population, a difference so profound that the result is internal colonialism, where outside groups decide the important aspects of their lives, letting them decide only those matters that do not clash with these outside interests. Thus, the historical violence suffered by indigenous peoples and communities takes on a structural character. Through this, they are excluded from everything important in national life and their internal life is controlled. At a national level, they only count as votes in elections while at a local level they can do whatever they want as long as they do not disturb the order of exploitation and colonial control that have been imposed on them.

But indigenous peoples have always resisted this violence against them. They have always sought and found a peaceful way of adapting themselves to it, pressurising and

negotiating with their oppressors according to their own capabilities and the alliances they manage to create. And when that is not possible, they have not hesitated to resort to arms, as an extreme measure, to defend their existence and their rights; they use violence to achieve peace. This was the case in the second part of the 19th century, when the consolidation of capital put in danger their existence as peoples, their territories and their own governments. They lost that war, but the defeat was not complete and they took up arms again in the 1917 revolution. They recovered something of what had been taken from them in the previous century –above all, their land– but they continued to be under attack and being made invisible, which is another subtle form of violence.

“ The historical violence suffered by indigenous peoples and communities acquires a structural character; they are excluded from everything important in national life and their internal life is controlled ”

One dramatic fact of the official violence against the indigenous peoples is that in all its existence, the Mexican air force has only ever used its bomber planes against the indigenous peoples: in 1927 against the Yaqui people of Sonora who refused to lay down their arms against the government until they had been returned the land that the politicians and businessmen had taken from them; in 1957 against the Triqui peoples of Oaxaca who had executed the commander of the military zone based in San Juan Copala, their political and ceremonial centre, because he stole their coffee and trafficked in weapons that he himself later confiscated; in 1994 against the Mayan peoples of the state of Chiapas organised in the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) that rose up in arms against the government because of the inhuman situation in which they were living.

Of all this, almost nobody remembers anything. In the same way, there are very few who remember the recent repressive actions against indigenous peoples, despite the fact

that these left dozens dead, wounded or disappeared and people deprived of their freedom, which at the time provoked popular outrage. The Aguas Blancas massacre in the state of Guerrero in June 1995; that of Acteal, in the state of Chiapas, in December 1997; that in Agua Fría, in Oaxaca, in May 2002; and the disappearance of students from the Ayotzinapa Rural Teachers' College (escuela Normal Rural Isidro Burgos), Guerrero, in September 2014, are only the best known cases. Even so, over time, memory gives way to oblivion and the demand for justice for the victims and the punishment of those responsible gradually fades away because other equally serious events demand people's attention.

Violence against peoples and communities

Last year, when Andrés Manuel López Obrador launched, for the third time, his candidacy for the Presidency of the Republic, many indigenous peoples, communities and organisations supported him because they saw in his candidacy the opportunity to change the situation of violence that they had been living through since the introduction of neoliberal policies, back in the last decade of the 20th century; others stayed on the sidelines but ended up supporting his candidacy, convinced that it was the least bad option of government. In other words, they cast their vote for him, not because he was the best option but because there was no other. Also because in his campaign he promoted a discourse sympathetic to indigenous peoples' struggles against extractivism and in defence of their territory and their natural resources. As we will see later, their assessment was not completely correct because the violence against them has not ceased one year into the new government.

This struggle has generated social instability and, in many cases, violence against opponents. According to the Commission for Dialogue with the Indigenous Peoples of Mexico, an instance of the federal government, in the past six years there were 312 conflicts that involved indigenous peoples and communities, where the triggers were mining exploitation projects, ownership and possession of land, infrastructure projects (roads, gas pipelines, hydrocarbon exploitation), hydraulic projects (construction of dams and aqueducts for the transfer of water from one water basin to another) and security and justice (organisation of community police). To these must be added those conflicts derived from the use of water and biodiversity, natural elements which

commercial companies value highly with the aim of taking them to the market.

“ Very few remember the recent repressive actions against indigenous peoples, despite the fact that these left dozens dead, wounded or disappeared and people deprived of their freedom ”

Another non-exhaustive report prepared by the National Indigenous Congress (CNI) –a space bringing together organisations that fight for the autonomy and rights of indigenous peoples that was created on 12 October 1996 to support compliance with the Agreements on Rights and Indigenous Culture between the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) and the federal government[1]– affirms that since then, the organisations that make up the CNI had suffered 117 murders and 11 disappearances of their members. However, according to this organisation, “The real figure is higher because this tentative list generally includes only those who had political and/or operational responsibilities. The names of those who were killed and resisted from their fields, their ceremonies, their daily tasks are absent.” And also absent are those affected by violence who belonged to organisations that do not participate in the CNI.

The CNI’s preliminary list of murdered activists who were members of its organisations includes 51 Tsotsiles from three communities in Chiapas; 33 Nahuas –22 from Michoacan, five from Jalisco, four from Guerrero, one from Morelos and one from Colima–; six Binnizá from two communities in Oaxaca; six Choles from three communities in Chiapas; five Purépechas from two communities in Michoacán; five Chontales from two communities in Oaxaca; three Triquis from two communities in Oaxaca; three Tseltals from two communities in Chiapas; two Chinantecos from Oaxaca; one Nu’saavi from Oaxaca, one Me’phaa and one Mixe from Oaxaca. The eleven disappeared indigenous people that are members of the CNI are 10 Nahuas –from Michoacán, Jalisco, Veracruz and Puebla– and a Oaxacan indigenous person

disappeared in Mexico City.

To these murders and political disappearances, we must add those killed during the current six-year mandate of Andrés Manuel López Obrador: Noé Jiménez Pablo, Santiago Gómez Álvarez, Samir Flores Soberanes, Julián Cortés Flores, Ignacio Pérez Girón, José Lucio Bartolo Faustino, Modesto Verales Sebastián, Bartolo Hilario Morales, Isaías Xanteco Ahuejote and a young Nahua from Colima. These are people who believed in the policies of change promised by the current government, but, as they hadn't seen this change, they continued to struggle to defend their rights. Another group is that of indigenous people deprived of their freedom, persecuted or threatened for defending their land and looking for a decent life for themselves, their families, their communities and their peoples.

Proposals for peace and a new life

Given this scenario, many leaders of the organisations of indigenous peoples and communities believe that there is a permanent war against them and that this will not stop unless pacifist alternatives are proposed. It is a war in which many factors and actors converge. On the one hand, we find the extractivist model of economic development, the relationship of capitalist companies with organised crime and the policies of subjection by the State. On the other, the defence of their territories put up by populations and communities through collective mobilisation. Furthermore, as time goes by, the people fighting back gradually transform their forms of struggle, distancing themselves from vertical methods of organisation, returning to their own models. Rather than in organisations, they come together in their own politico-religious structures, which are very varied. There it is possible to find everything from democratic practices, where the assemblies make the decisions that are then carried out by their representatives, through to military models, where what carries most weight is the leaders' experience of armed conflict. Another organisational aspect to be considered is that which gives civil bodies a pre-eminence over religious structures, although in many cases what we see is the opposite.

Along with their methods of struggle, their goals have also changed. They have gone from directly confronting the government, demanding it recognise their rights, to

strengthening their local structures and, from that basis, resisting attacks from outside. And here find the most important point, because in doing this they resort to their historical experience and their cultural values, maintained and recreated for centuries. It is in the new methods of struggle and in the change of objectives that alternatives can be found for the pacification, not only of the indigenous peoples and communities, but also of the country; if, that is, attention is paid to the message they are transmitting and to what they can teach us. Many people consider that there is now no indigenous movement because they no longer occupy public squares or offices, nor can they be seen marching through the broad avenues of the big cities. If they visited the different communities, they would be astonished by people's constant debates about their future, their rituals to beg forgiveness of Mother Earth for not having taken care of her and allowing her to come to harm; their calls on their deities to enlighten them. Everything in their own way, in their own time and using their own mechanisms.

The peoples and communities call these processes the reconstitution and creation of autonomies. There are all kinds of these, depending on the needs of the indigenous peoples and communities, on the possibilities of achieving the objectives that are proposed, the resources they have to achieve that and, often, the support they can obtain from the alliances that they establish. In this, without a doubt, the experience in Zapatista territory is important, but there are also others across the whole territory of Mexico. In the north, the peoples fight for the defence of their territories under attack by capital; in the centre as well, although here the processes are diversified, since there are processes of creation of self governments and community police for security, based on their own resources, a long way away from the mandate of the state.

“ The new indigenous movements not only want to end violence, but also to bring an end to what causes it. They want to transform what is noxious in the western world, offering in return the best of their world ”

In other cases, the indigenous peoples and communities create projects, planned and designed by the people themselves. Among these we can find projects of reforestation or water capture, where society is reconciled with nature; food cultivation projects, where they plant what they themselves consume, making rational use of the land and putting into practice their ancestral knowledge; or education projects disconnected from official models and prioritising local knowledge. And flourishing alongside them we find cultural projects of local poets, historians and philosophers that would considerably enrich official cultural and educational policies, if they were taken into account.

The important thing about these processes is that instead of demanding state recognition for their autonomy, they exercise it as a genuine way of life. In an environment of daily violence, the rebuilding of villages and the creation of autonomies becomes an organisational and political resource with which the peoples face up to multiple forms of violence: against (structural) domination and dispossession, against the (political) violence of the state, against stigma (discrimination), against organised crime. The new indigenous movements not only want to end violence, but also to bring an end to what causes it. They want to transform what is noxious in the western world, offering in return the best of their world. At the centre of these complex processes is the construction of autonomies, with their own resources, showing that one can live in peace if the common good is given priority over private interests.

Conclusion

As can be seen, indigenous peoples' alternatives for ending the violence that is engulfing the country aren't focussed on fixing the things in the system that don't work, because they know that this is not possible, and even if it were, it would only solve the problem of the direct, immediate violence of the mestizo society, while the structural, colonial, racist and discriminatory violence that has been directed against them historically would continue to persist and, after a few years, would reappear. That is why they insist on changing the rules of the game, attacking the root causes of the problem that, according to their understanding, are found in the very design of the state that Mexicans have built over time, from which they and their rights were excluded. According to the indigenous peoples and communities, for there to be peace, the state

must be transformed from its very roots, so that we can all have the chance to live in dignity.

To achieve this, they offer their experience of resistance but, above all, their cultural values, which include prioritising the collective over the individual; solidarity with those who have less; the gift of offering what nature has given, a different relationship between society and nature; governments that can be more horizontal and assembly led or more vertical, but must always attend to the preservation of the common good for the well-being of all. In a time of crisis, where the existence of life itself is at stake, this should be valued with all the seriousness it requires. It is very likely that the solutions to the problems caused by globalisation can be found at the local level. Indigenous peoples and communities offer us a way to build a better future for all. Whether or not we are able to listen to them depends on us.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Originally from the community of Santa Rosa Caxtlahuaca, in the Oaxacan part of the Mixtec region, Francisco López Bárcenas has postgraduate studies in Law and Rural Development. Teacher, researcher and adviser to indigenous communities, he has also held community positions in his home town and has documented the history of the Mixtec peoples, contemporary indigenous movements and the transformations of the State and its legislation.

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Photography María de Jesús Patricio, Nahua indigenous.

Migrant caravans in Mexico: mass nonviolent mobilisations

Pietro Ameglio Patella
Professor at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM)

Since the beginning of the Zapatista struggle in 1994, the social actions described as caravans have actually been nonviolent columns of civil society actors that go through or break down the blockades and barriers of war, (para)militarism, hunger or repression. They have been effective in building bonds of solidarity and struggle between the civilian population and communities in resistance, they have constituted a force to help in the material reproduction of the besieged populations. They have also warned the besieging forces that the encircled population is not alone. These caravans have gone from civil society to Zapatista territories or from within Zapatista communities to outside their territories, as ways of breaking through the political and military siege, the barrier or the blockade.

We can currently find two historic experiences of this type of action in Mexico, led by key social actors in national and regional peacebuilding: the families of victims of disappearances; and Central American migrants. Some Migrant Caravans or Search Brigades for the Disappeared have even been carried out jointly, since many Central American family members also come to Mexico to “try to find their loved ones alive”, searching for those they have lost track of for years. One of the main effects of this type of nonviolent action has been the empowerment of some of these social actors, who evolve from struggling for their material and moral survival to becoming active subjects for their rights, fighting for a change in their situation and that of others with similar social identities.

Walking to break the siege

The Migrant Caravans/Exodus/Columns are also a massive action of non-cooperation to "break the barriers, the siege", in a direct confrontation with the governments and criminal forces in their home countries that rob them of their minimum material conditions for survival. These actions have grown considerably since November 2018, mainly from Honduras, and seem to represent a change in migrants' strategy of nonviolent struggles, whether or not these migrants are organised. Leaving aside the many hypotheses and conjectures about their origin, the identity of the participants, how they organise and finance themselves, the political and social pressure they exert on the governments of the region, and the manipulation that has been made of them in Trump's search for re-election, the caravans "are a reality, not an invention," as the Secretariat of the Interior of Mexico has declared.[1] On the basis of this "reality principle" we aim to make an initial reflection about them strictly from the angle of the strategy and the tactics of nonviolent struggle, and not about their origins, constitution or effects.

The line of the "border of inhumanity" which means not knowing if you will be able to reproduce yourself the next day, reached a point of no return with exponential growth in the regions of Central America and Mexico. The sacrifice and desperation are enormous, but so are the moral and material determination. Gandhi maintained as the core element of his nonviolent strategy the principle that suffering itself would be the main weapon to destroy oppression and change the adversary's mind. The testimony of mothers, old people, children, disabled people, men... walking and overcoming a thousand problems each day is both deeply painful and at the same time an example of what it really means to struggle. We find ourselves before an admirable column of nonviolent strugglers. Mahatma Gandhi didn't base his affirmation on a simplistic, idealistic, religious, even masochistic attitude, but rather on a strategy that aimed for the constant accumulation of "moral force" on his side. For that is the first and main nonviolent weapon in every confrontation, to achieve a "rupture" towards truth and justice within the adversary. That moral force, migrants' key weapon in this peacebuilding action, is based on what Pope Francis has declared: "People [are] exercising their legitimate right to seek a better life elsewhere".[2]

“ Walking such long distances *en masse* has also been a widely used form of nonviolent struggle throughout the history of social movements: it generates solidarity and permits a gradual growth in consciousness by the population ”

These caravans occur above all due to two great causes. On the one hand, the hunger generated by predatory transnational capitalist expropriation and economic exploitation of natural resources, bodies and territories in these populations’ countries of origin. On the other hand, the terror and hopelessness caused by the use of violence and war –something which the Zapatistas maintain that “we refuse to call by its name”– as forms of control, surveillance, dispossession and extermination of part of the population. War and hunger are deeply interrelated with the establishment of criminal States in this new stage of capitalism.[3] Basically, it is about the construction and reproduction of an enormous illegal business: the multiple trafficking in bodies that are very vulnerable due to their being far from their own identities, their family or community networks of origin, terrorised by violence or hunger, with no other real ways of surviving in their own territories.

The migrant caravans have been conceptualised on occasions as actions of “human mobility”. That is only a partial description, since these caravans are also actions of social struggle. Their means of mobilisation are their feet, the train called La Bestia (from Arriaga in Chiapas to Ixtepec in Oaxaca), solidarity rides, buses… and also social networks. The very different types of calls for action from these networks, the collective protection, as well as the follow-up and acceleration of the action, and even the “virtual progress” of actions, have been fundamental in building the massive advancing human tide as well as the social and political perception that, just like the sea, this advance is unstoppable, growing and even “natural” –because of the legitimacy arising from the fact that this is a struggle against hunger and war. Networks –in different senses– bring both virtues and risks: they are largely anonymous, which makes it difficult for the

existing powers –whether legal or illegal– to identify the leaders of the nonviolent actions and repress them, but they also make it possible to hide other objectives.

Walking such long distances *en masse* has also been a widely used form of nonviolent struggle throughout the history of social movements, because it is something essential to people and their daily lives, like drinking water or eating; because it is something that generates solidarity inside and outside the movement; because it is an action that has a "slow rhythm" which permits a gradual growth in consciousness by the population and thus a growth in participation and solidarity, which in turn increases the moral and material strength of the walkers and in some way inhibits repression. This type of action can help establish negotiations. It is a type of action that makes it possible to "uncover the truth" clearly, forcefully and publicly, as Gandhi said. Historic walks of the past include Gandhi's Salt March (March-April 1930), the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom of the African-American movement led by Martin Luther King (August 1963), or the Zapatista March of the Colour of the Earth (January-April 2001).

Migrant peacebuilders: Non-cooperation with inhumane orders

Furthermore, as well as being a mass mobilisation to break a siege, the caravans are also actions of non-cooperation by the civilian population. Through them, people exercise "due disobedience to all inhumane orders"[4], since the migrants refuse to let themselves be recruited by organised crime, to kill or to die of hunger and despair. It is therefore a significant "nonviolent strategic offensive", which has as its leading social subjects Central American migrants, and relatives of victims of the war in Mexico, who decide to exercise their social power, their moral identity and autonomy in a direct way, facing up to political power, "without asking permission" (as the Zapatista *comandante* David said at the creation of the Juntas de Buen Gobierno in August 2003), but also seeking the greatest number of social and governmental alliances.

“ Migrants are also, in a way, “peacebuilders”. Instead of taking up arms, they choose the “displacement” of their own body beyond the territory involved in the war; it is an action of confronting the violence ”

Thus migrants are also, in a way, “peacebuilders”. For that reason we should see them not only as a population that has been terrorised and made desperate by poverty and violence, but also as fighters, strugglers in the true sense of the word. Instead of taking up arms, and thus intensifying the spiral of violence in their territories, they choose a form of nonviolent struggle: the “displacement” of their own body beyond the territory involved in the war for power and natural and bodily resources. Deepening its form and meaning, it is not only an action of fleeing from but also confronting the violence, putting their bodies on the line outside of the reproduction and the reach of the war. As we have learnt well from the Mexican populations (especially from Guerrero, Chiapas and Sinaloa) that have been displaced or are in self-defence: when the level of immediate violence shuts us into a siege from which we can not escape without getting involved in that level of inhumanity, there are two options: face up to it with weapons (although this is in self-defence and continually trying not to use them but only to show them, without intensifying the spiral of the war but pushing it back) or move. Both are valid forms of struggle for justice and a dignified life, which help the long-term processes of “humanisation” of our species, distancing us a little from the war.

To analyse this strategy of nonviolent struggle, it is also important to pick apart the “social totality” conceptualised as a caravan, into a set of constituent actions that vary greatly in forms-instruments-subjects, of different degrees of violence and nonviolence (sit-down protests, occupation of spaces, clashes with the police to break barriers, solidarity from the local population, negotiations with authorities, clandestine escapes, rallies, marches, sit-ins…).

These long marches have some common historical characteristics: they gradually create a growing “snowball” of actions and a “suspense” and social expectation about what will come next and what will happen at the end (crossing the northern Mexican border). Media coverage of human tragedies and of confrontations with the authorities and criminal gangs –which are sometimes one and the same– sometimes make it possible for the media –consciously or not– to even become allies of these struggles.

Thus, continuing with the strategic analysis, the migrant caravans through Mexico have, at their most recent stage, since November 2018, gone through an apparent change in their nonviolent strategy, going, in a certain sense and according to a Gandhian logic, from “passive resistance” to “active resistance” on the lines of “satyagraha” (the force of truth), with a high degree of public exposure, with an open “challenge to the authorities” of the different countries. According to their organisers, this gives them greater legitimacy, moral strength, security for the participants, bargaining power and social assistance from the authorities. They thus represent at the same time both strategies of struggle and security.

The migrant caravans in Mexico have experienced a strategic change, from passive resistance to active resistance, and from almost clandestine actions to the most public and media oriented ones

“ In turn, they have gone from a historic process characterised mainly by almost clandestine actions to direct nonviolent actions that are as public and media oriented as possible. Gandhi normally announced his actions publicly before carrying them out, as a way of legitimising them, of relating positively with the authorities and of reducing fear among the participants on both

sides. ”

But the opponents also fight for a historical, political and sociological truth that is often forgotten. So we will also see how all types of provocation, threats and attacks continue to grow. These will mostly come from the Trump government, but the Mexican government is increasingly doing its share of repressive, intimidating and militarised actions on the two borders. What they will be aiming for is to reinforce the spiral of violence and xenophobia and terrorise the local population, so that the caravan actions lose moral strength both internally and in outside eyes, so that the misinformed and terrified local populations demand and celebrate “exemplary punishments”. Thus there will be an increase in racist actions “in the name of the law” and the “hunt” for migrants by right-wing groups and militias. Although this is especially palpable in the United States, xenophobia is also on the rise in Mexican cities.

Finally, as a way of enriching and also giving complexity to the nonviolent strategy, we believe that caravans should have a good number of bishops or religious leaders, university rectors, artists and intellectuals from Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico and the United States leading them, united in one single body and accompanying them, walking in an “exemplary” way for a few days. In this way an important moral and material “nonviolent weapon” would be activated, whose social power — due to the institutions or other forces they represent —gives these subjects a role of social “moral reserve”. Rarely in history do such people “place their body” in nonviolent direct actions against the powers that be, especially actions of non-cooperation and civil disobedience, which is what is necessary to be able proportionally to face up to and stop the massive level of violence.

It is also clear that “putting our bodies on the line” alongside the migrants is a nonviolent task not only for those actors who have the greatest social impact and ability to pressurise the authorities, but also of the rest of us, as a civil society that wants to show solidarity. We must give our direct support to this struggle for material and moral survival, for the construction of justice and peace in the continent, for the humanisation of the species over the long term, an effort led by so many impoverished masses who struggle, above all with their own bodies, with their sacrifice, with their

moral and spiritual dignity, with their “relentless persistence”.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Pietro Ameglio Patella is professor of Culture of Peace and Nonviolence in the School of Philosophy and Letters of the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) and responsible for the “Education Program for Peace and Nonviolence: Learning Alternatives and Transformation of Violence” since 2017. He has specialized in areas of epistemology, education, construction and culture of peace; nonviolent civil resistance; construction of violence and reconstruction of the social fabric; autonomous and popular education; social research and databases. Author of several publications, in 2014 he received the El-Hibri Peace Education Prize, in Washington.

1. Martínez, Fabiola. “Las caravanas son una realidad, no un invento: señala Gobernación” in *La Jornada.* México, 31-3-2019.

2. AP. “Los muros no detendrán las migraciones” in *La Jornada.* México, 31-3-2019.

3. Equipo Bourbaki. “El costo humano de la guerra por la construcción del monopolio del narcotráfico en México (2008-2009)”. English translation here.

4. This slogan was initially coined by Dr. Juan Carlos Marín, a noted Argentinean sociologist, and was revived in the Final Declaration of the XXII Congress of the Latin American Sociology Association (ALAS), held at Concepción, Chile, in October 1999.

Photography “Los migrantes no somos ilegales, somos trabajadores internacionales”

From rage to organisation. Mexican youth in the reconstruction of peace

Alicia Reynoso Peña
Psychologist, ITESO, Jesuit University of Guadalajara, Mexico

The aim of this text is to give recognition to the role of Mexican young people in the peace reconstruction processes that are necessary and urgent in Mexico. The levels of violence that are currently being reached have serious effects on young people's experience of daily life. The fear and the terror being sown, the distrust in institutions and the despair generated by governments lead to a situation where being young is a risk factor which brings no privileges but, at the same time, is a status full of possibilities of resistance.

Today's Mexico cannot be separated from two events which are fundamental to understanding the self-organisation and mobilisation of Mexican youth over recent years. The first is the disappearance of 43 teaching students in Ayotzinapa, in the state of Guerrero in 2014. This event unleashed a collective discontent that sharpened the rejection of the government of the time. It should be mentioned, however, that before that government had taken office, another movement had emerged, #YoSoy132, in opposition to the administration of Enrique Peña Nieto. #YoSoy132 called for the democratisation of the media, the economy and education. The exasperation was already there and, when the state's involvement in the disappearance of the 43 students came to light, there was outrage at a level that had not been seen for many years.

As those who disappeared were students, there was a very significant element of identification created so that, from this moment on, we young people began to experience a type of consciousness that we had not felt before. The pain experienced in 1968 with the Tlatelolco massacre was revived in Mexican people's collective

consciousness and student mobilisations began. The fact of being a student once again became a risk factor. This was confirmed in 2018 with a second significant event: the forced disappearance of three film students in the city of Guadalajara. The young men were making a video as part of their professional training when they were captured by members of a drug cartel. The official story or "historical truth" of the Jalisco Prosecutor's Office is that they were killed and disposed of in sulphuric acid. However, the ambiguity in the evidence and the lack of precision in the details of the investigation meant that the anger and discontent with the state increased.

" How can we care for each other in a country where human dignity, safety and freedom are not a priority? "

In the cases of the 43 Ayotzinapa teaching students and the three film students, one factor that accelerated the publicising of the cases was that the families and friends of those affected went into action immediately to make the facts known and to demand justice. As a result of the upset generated by the events related to the students' forced disappearance, young people's relationship networks went into action, generating endless strategies to express the rage felt in the face of the structural violence that was clearly implicated in the events. On the other hand, young people's self organisation led to a rethink about what we can do to put caring at the centre of things: that is, how can we care for each other in a country where human dignity, safety and freedom are not a priority?

These events produced a breach of normal daily life in universities, on the streets and in social networks. Within the universities there were active stoppages, assemblies, meetings to discuss collective actions. In the streets, many symbolic acts, marches and slogans expressed this discontent in the public arena. Social networks were full of information about the case, of "missing" posters, and debates and discussions took place about the events. Undoubtedly, the families have been the most affected and those most involved in these processes, but the role of young people is crucial in

understanding how these movements of indignation have been sustained. It should also be noted that universities, streets and social networks are privileged spaces, such that the most mobilised sectors are also those that are most privileged.

Gradually the involvement in political issues spreads in response to the growth in the number of people affected by such events. The increase in violence and the disproportionate fear with which we are living are becoming a general question, to the point that although many things continue to be silenced and the privileges of a few are preserved, there are dialogues being opened today that in other circumstances would perhaps not occur. The sensations of terror, discontent, disappointment and frustration have brought us to name and make visible our shared needs.

Given the scenario of violence in which we find ourselves, we have gone from indifference to indignation. It is well known that more and more people are implicating themselves in the political and economic situation of the country. It is no longer so common to hear expressions like “I’m not interested in politics” which we often used to hear when we were children. As we have grown up, we have come to realise how dangerous that indifference was, in a country that requires us to use all the instruments, actions, reflections and resistance that we have within our reach.

“ Given the scenario of violence in which we find ourselves, we have gone from indifference to indignation ”

In the same way that we face the forced disappearance of thousands of young people in the country, over recent years feminicidal violence has increased massively, coming to affect especially the lives of young women. The murder of Lesvy Berlin at UNAM, the best known university in the country, unleashed indignation and rage, leading to the mobilisation of many women’s networks. The slogan #NiUnaMenos (Not One Less), which had already been raised by Argentinean women, became the symbol of an urgent and essential demand in Mexico. It has contributed to making visible the institutional

failure in the face of the tremendous wave of feminicides where not even universities and other well known places are safe spaces. Lesvy's case is one of the thousands that occur in our country. Nowadays, new cases of feminicide are recorded every day, so this the state of alert is a call on us to mobilise.

It is important to talk about the women's movements over recent years since feminism has come to be seen in different ways and with new meanings in the common sense of Mexican women. Feminism used to be a bad word, tinged with radicalism or exaggeration, while today we see 13-year-old girls defining themselves as feminists with the conviction that they themselves must defend their rights. From the emergence of the debate on the decriminalisation and legalisation of abortion, the reflections concerning the right to decide about our bodies have become a watershed in identifying the possibilities of defending ourselves. In many cases, self organisation and mutual support among women has been the answer. A few years ago, in feminist marches and meeting spaces we almost always saw the same faces. Recently, the need to question the absolute truths that we have been taught culturally has become part of critical and self-critical processes.

It is clear that feminist discourse and practices permeate the lives of young women. We see how in all the universities and beyond them, feminist groups, seminars, meetings, etc. are being organised. And there are more and more demands for protocols on dealing with gender violence, as well as more demand for training courses for teachers in issues related to gender perspectives and for specialised materials on the subject, something that before seemed a distant dream for Mexican female university students. We see women's meetings organised by the Zapatista comrades, by autonomous spaces, by collectives and spaces of ongoing political education among women of all ages. These actions promoted by the different feminisms generate care practices that are clearly different from the hegemonic and paternalistic discourses regarding safety and care. Feminist resistances are characterised by putting politicisation, sisterhood and emotions at the centre, which clearly have to do with the reconstruction of peace. Feminist care strategies are key to the rearticulation of the Mexican community, since feminisms have taught us about the meanings and the power of protecting dignity and equality as guiding principles of our actions.

“ One of the great contributions of youth for a less violent Mexico has been our questioning of the power relations we were taught us see as natural ”

Over recent years, these networks have produced new forms of protesting and organising to demand and insist on a decent life. The objective is not to seek answers and solutions provided by the state, but to occupy and take over spaces and build new ways of connecting ourselves and living our lives. The strikes and active stoppages of #8M are an example of this. International Women’s Day (8 March) has been redefined by feminist movements, not as a celebration that reproduces patriarchal practices and discourses, but rather with a political content, as a reminder of the historical debt that society owes to women.

The typical images associated with youth have generated the belief that this is a stage characterised by indifference about what is happening around them, in which concerns are focussed on social life, having fun and not taking responsibility for one’s own life and for social, collective issues. However, the current situation has led young people to grow in the face of the adversities and dangers, thus favouring the development of critical thinking from an earlier age. Thus, Mexican young people are very much in contact with the needs of a country overrun by violence and in which strategies must be sought to organise resistance.

Universities remain important locations for organising in the face of violence. On other fronts there are also actions by autonomous spaces, young indigenous people who continue struggles that began with uprisings by their grandparents, young people who join groups of mothers looking for their missing sons and daughters, alternatives to the parties with political proposals articulated by young people, as well as the political use of media and social networks. Multiple possibilities open up of critical spaces aimed at reflection and organisation around diverse themes: gender violence, collective care on the basis of self-management, the increasingly widespread gentrification processes in

Mexican cities, forced disappearances, urban mobility, environmental crisis; that is to say, a range of issues that are constantly interlinked. The arts, journalism, research, audiovisual productions, the use of big data and geolocation tools are some of the elements of interdisciplinary collaborative knowledge that are being put at the service of the community with the aim of achieving a better city and a better country for everyone. They are a substantial part of the construction of the historical memory of all these collective actions.

“ The construction of peace in Mexico must start from the most everyday actions and from common sense, with caring, friendship, sisterhood and solidarity at the centre ”

Apart from the participation of students from the universities, from autonomous groups or from the professional tools that we young people use to resist in the face of violence, it is important to mention the value of self-criticism in our social relationships and our daily activities. It is recognised that one of the great contributions of youth for a less violent Mexico has been our questioning of the power relations we were taught us see as natural, putting into question heteronormative ideals or even questioning the meaning of our education, for example. These elements transform the interactions that make up our lives; for that reason, the exercise of self-criticism leads us to relationships more grounded in solidarity and mutual care. This critical attitude in daily life is changing the typical images concerning young people, making it possible to see them not as one single thing, but as a plurality of options where there is the possibility of encountering others in order to question, rethink, build and rebuild a more decent country for everyone.

We cannot ignore the fact that, to the extent that participation in organisational processes has increased, there has been an increasing polarisation of discourses in today’s conversations, producing tensions between the ways we identify ourselves. There seem to be no shades of grey in how we position ourselves over issues, either you

are “on the right” or “on the left”, either you are “radical” or you are “soft”, leaving no room for the understanding of complex processes, leaving out all other factors to define something as black or white without allowing any other possibilities. Thus, when talking about a topic of common interest, it seems that there is a need to impose one viewpoint over others; it is a question of convincing rather than of building. We can note the existence of hate speech directed against those we identify with the other extreme, which is also something reflected in youth identities, in the struggles that are chosen and in the ways in which we position ourselves politically. The challenge we face is to be able to establish shared points of reference and feelings on the basis of the acceptance of difference. Despite the fact that the debates and reflections around common issues may involve disputed areas, we will have to find strategies to build together; otherwise, we will be losing one of the most important battles, making us unable to differentiate the nuances between the different tensions in which we are immersed as a society.

Regardless of the discourses that are in dispute, it is clear that there is a strong involvement of youth in the social development of our country. Questioning the decisions and actions of the state has become a daily matter, whether posting feelings and thoughts on Facebook or Twitter as a starting point for meeting and talking, or carrying out symbolic actions in the streets. It should be recognised that most of the organisational spaces are made up of and led by young people. It restores hope to think that in a few years it will be that group that will be capable of leading our country. Social movements, collective action and any type of organisational process; all these are crucial and open the possibility of a Mexico that is more critical, more sensitive and shows more solidarity, with the tools to rise up from the horror it now faces. It is essential to keep in mind that the construction of peace in Mexico must start from the most everyday actions and from common sense, with caring, friendship, sisterhood and solidarity at the centre.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

She graduated in Psychology at ITESO, Jesuit University of Guadalajara, Mexico. Her interests are collective processes, feminisms, gentrification and the relationship between technology and emotions. She has participated actively in various mobilisations in her city, in the feminist movements and in the interuniversity organisation against forced disappearances. She is part of the team of Signa_Lab

ITESO, a laboratory for experimentation and research on networks.

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Photography #YoSoy132

IN DEPTH

Education for peace in contexts of violence

Gloria María Abarca Obregón
Doctor in International Peace, Conflict and Development Studies, UNESCO Chair of Philosophy for Peace, Jaume I University of Castellón

Talking about education for peace in contexts where violence s intense or has direct repercussions raises questions not only for peace education, but for the very conception of peace, as well as for those who work for peace. For that reason, different responses and options can arise which aim to open spaces of peace, making it possible to start breaking the cycles of violence. In the words of the researcher John Paul Lederach: "peace is seen not merely as a stage in time or a condition. It is a dynamic social construct. Such a conceptualisation requires a process of building"[1].

In areas with forms of direct violence it is essential to make visible, open up and sustain this peace-building process, as a first step in the reduction of violence. It is important to convey the idea that despite the violence that is being or has been experienced, there is a way of acting such that violence does not continue to be the answer to what is happening or has happened. And it is through the actions for peace that spaces are created which bring fresh air and make it possible to reduce its intensity. Some of these peace actions consist in responding to questions such as the following. Who are we? Who are we with? Then, following the idea of resilience: What is it that we do have? What is it that we can do? And finally: What are we already doing in peace actions?

To gradually interweave such actions within the various spaces, the creation of a peace network helps. This network allows us to move away from the position of indifference, paralysis and normalisation created by violence, as well as to obtain new perspectives

and tools and, above all, when violence reaps its toll, to generate spaces for care and healing.

Peacebuilding in Mexico

To talk about Mexico today is to show a broad mosaic with many tonalities, in which elements of profound darkness are combined with others of brightness and great hope. It is to see that life goes on, and that life takes care of life. It is important to show aspects of peace that are being worked on in Mexico such as the creation of peace networks, in rural hamlets, in the communities, peace spaces and practices in official schools, restorative practices in prisons, among others, which are sometimes not made visible in the face of the strong impacts left by violence. This violence is not fixed in one place, but movable, and has a varying intensity, with momentary peaks. But, precisely, these peaks are intense, accentuated, and provoke fear among the people. Therefore, it is important that spaces of peace exist that can gradually transform what needs to be shifted and transformed.

“ To talk about Mexico today is to show a broad mosaic with many tonalities, in which elements of profound darkness are combined with others of brightness and great hope ”

To speak of Mexico is to show its diverse realities, as well as those of the world. The point is that the violence here has a lot to do with the violence there, so achieving peace here is linked to achieving peace there. It is to see that we are interdependent, we are interconnected. And it means having a broader vision and a more open heart. Since we are all interwoven and the privileges of some are the violence of others, let’s see how we can begin to take care of each other and see ourselves as a shared, connected and interdependent humanity.

Peace proposals and practices

In the light of these reflections and of the conception of the pedagogue José Tuvilla who creates peace spaces in schools, here are a series of proposals that could be applied in Mexico to promote a culture of peace in schools, through good practices that Francisco Muñoz defines as "spaces which offer equilibrium, safety and sustainability, all of which are very important conditions for peace; we can see that there are many spaces of 'imperfect' peace at the micro, meso and macro levels of human societies"[2].

It is therefore about creating spaces for meeting, dialogue, caring, recognition, active participation and networking. This is where peace is built.

Connection spaces

It is highly revolutionary to return to the connection of the human being with him or herself, with the other and with nature, to make the pauses necessary to see what is alive in me, in the other and to take care of life. One of the methodologies that allows this is Marshall Rosenberg's Nonviolent Communication (NVC), which recovers the connection, observation, feelings and needs in the face of a conflict, situation or event so as to formulate a petition.

Spaces for meeting and cooperation

The educational community has different spaces for coming together, which can be spaces for meeting and building relationships with people. One way is through cooperative games, as a way of finding ourselves through caring, collaborative working and changing our mindset from competitiveness to cooperation. Activities in which you can see the need for a paradigm shift from the individual to the collective, from just one group to the collective in general, where it is not just about broadening our thoughts but also our heart.

Spaces for recovery, curing and compassion

When there has been direct violence, it is important to offer spaces where the cycles of violence are broken. When a person who has been a victim of violence does not have an adequate space for recovery or curing, the pain they have suffered can easily provoke a new cycle of violence in which this person becomes the perpetrator of violence. Many

perpetrators were previously victims. That is why offering spaces for recovery, reconciliation, forgiveness or healing is important in being able to rebuild despite the violence that has been experienced. The necessary tools include exercises in mindfulness, the creation of circles of peace and exercises in compassion.

Spaces for networking

John Paul Lederach suggests that to establish platforms of transformation it is necessary to weave networks. The creation of these networks has to be with people who are close, not with people who we want to change or convince or who we think need it; and there has to be a primary network held together by everybody and other complementary networks can emerge from there. These networks are sustained through activities, meetings, sharing experience or giving support or help in situations of conflict or crisis.

“ You have to create spaces for meeting, dialogue, care, recognition, active participation and networking. This is where peace is built ”

These spaces for peace are established through different practices of peace:

1. Practices of peace from the human: one would think that it is not necessary to educate human beings to be human, but what violence does is precisely to disconnect the human being from themselves, from life and from others. That is why the capacity to reconnect the different dimensions of the human being within everyday practices will make it possible to break the cycles of violence and enable a peace-building process.

Through activities that promote the recovery of the capacity of amazement, enjoyment, connection, caring for oneself and for others.

2. Dignifying teaching work. If we are saying that recognition is one of the first spaces of peace, it is important to include teaching work within that recognition, dignifying the work that is already being done, and at the same time generating a collective educational conscience, as well as favouring the creation of bonds of union between the different groups with their own diversities and styles for the good of the collective.

The intention of practices of peace is for them to multiply themselves within the school communities themselves through the peace networks and for these to offer alternatives, even in situations of crisis.

Experience of Peace Education

In this context, it is worth briefly presenting a concrete experience of peace education that was carried out from 2017 to 2019 in high-risk regions of the State of Mexico: the diploma in “Holistic Peace and Coexistence in School” offered by Integrated Educational Services to the State of Mexico.

The face-to-face phase of this diploma was carried out in areas of Valle de Toluca and Valle de México where there are high rates of violence. Eight groups of 40 teachers participated, most of them professionals working in the field of education in high-risk areas and who have sometimes been the direct victims of violent acts. Through the construction of a network, many schools were involved in the project.

“ The experiences of peace in Mexico are diverse, but little publicised. Bringing them together through peace networks makes it easier to see their impact and importance ”

In addition to creating this network of peace educators, the Diploma was an important space for reflection that revealed some key issues and challenges for peace education in Mexico. Among them, we can highlight the following points: Educators who work in areas of high violence often have a negative conception of peace, thinking that it is only

the absence of war, but also at the same time a romantic idea of peace, in the sense that things have to be perfect to achieve it and that we are all going to love each other and hold hands. That is why one of the first actions is to present peace in the plural, that is, as “peaces”: different forms with which one can work, a wider, more tangible and practical vision of the concept of peace. At the same time a peace of the here and now, the idea that as we are imperfect we can establish an imperfect peace which is an ongoing process, even in areas where there is violence. In violent settings, peace is conceived as something distant, so it is important to bring it closer, to live it as a space that makes it possible to break a cycle of violence. The idea of holistic peace that was proposed in contexts of violence was a peace with me, with other people, with other realities. This requires the use of different dimensions of human beings’ ways of learning: bodily, emotional, intellectual and life experience. Understanding holistic peace as the sum of the parts plus the whole, where each action –whether internal or external– affects the whole.

In areas where violence is present, and more so if it is continuous, the darker aspects of humanity become normalised and have an impact on us. This cycle of violence is not only external, but also internal: it disconnects you from life, from yourself and from other people, with more violence being generated by despair. That is why it is important to generate hope through the recognition of the actions that they do carry out in their own setting, with what they do have and can count on, especially focused on their students and what they can do together. In addition, for people who work in violent places, it is important that they also have their own spaces for recovery, for connecting with life, as well as for recognition of their work and self-recognition.

A proposal that helped in violent areas was establishing peace networks, among teachers, school management, families and students, as such a network allows them to fulfil their need to be heard, understood and motivated to be peace builders in their educational community. And to see that there are several of us who are building options to restore equilibrium in what is happening.

“ Peace in Mexico has changed from an ideal to a space of proposals from which some concrete actions have already emerged ”

Experiencing violence at first hand, rather than just attending to or working with people who suffer violence, increases its effects on us. Often it paralyses us. Therefore, in terms of peace, we must understand the possibility of the process, make visible what is happening, name it and also point out the peace actions that already exist. We must identify what we can do, without putting our own physical safety at risk, since many times students come from families where not only is there domestic violence, but also where other forms of violence are exercised. In these cases, what a teacher can do is to work on peace with the students who come to the school, opening a space of encounter with others, on the basis of nonviolent communication, cooperation, resilience, where each person’s environment determines the attitude. In the face of so many spaces of risk, we must generate more spaces of protection.

Conclusion

The concept of peace is something alive, that moves, that allows dialogue between life and what is not life. It is not an ideal, it is the continuous construction of humanity, the space, the practice that humanises the human and where we meet each other as humanity.

The possibility of generating spaces and practices of peace in places where violence is experienced is not only real and important, it is a necessary step and we have to make known the tools that make these practices possible. Even with the challenge of there being very few specialists, there are more places being created every day for training in issues of peace, such as peace circles, restorative circles and practices, nonviolent communication or cooperative peace games. It must also be borne in mind that more and more universities are establishing postgraduate courses on issues related to peace education and culture.

There is still a long way to go, but it must be acknowledged that, over the last five years, peace in Mexico has changed from an ideal to a space of proposals from which some concrete actions have already emerged.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gloria María Abarca Obregón has a doctorate in International Peace, Conflict and Development Studies from the UNESCO Chair of Philosophy for Peace at the Jaume I University of Castellón. Coordinator of international peace education projects and of the DEEP peace network. Winner jointly with Said Bahajin of the City of Castellón Peace Prize for 2009. She is also a researcher and teacher on the subject of holistic peace education in various States of Mexico, Colombia, Paraguay and Spain.

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This is a translated version of the article originally published in Spanish.

Photography Documentary meeting for peace

RECOMANEM

Materials and resources recommended by the ICIP

Books
Bibliography on Mexico

The ICIP Library has several titles that address the multiple forms violence that are experienced in Mexico and the challenges of security, human rights and peacebuilding.

In this link you will find a selection of books on this subject, all of them available on loan.

The library, located at Carrer Tapineria 10, 1st floor, in Barcelona, is a center specialized in issues of peace culture, security and conflicts. The library's collection covers the following thematic areas: peace and nonviolence, armed conflicts, transformation and conflict resolution, international law, political science, international relations, security, disarmament, terrorism, development cooperation, social movements and environmental policies.

Reports
Recent publications on peace, human rights and security in Mexico

In this link we offer you a selection of the main reports that deal with the situation in Mexico from a perspective of peace, security and human rights, published between 2018 and 2019.

The selection includes publications from international organizations such as the Institute for Economics and Peace, International Crisis Group, Peace Brigades International, WOLA, Amnesty International, ONU-DH Mexico, or the Comisión

Interamericana de Derechos Humanos; as well as from Mexican entities and institutions such as CASEDE, the Comisión Mexicana de Defensa y Promoción de los Derechos Humanos, the Comisión de Derechos Humanos del Distrito Federal or the Red por los Derechos de la Infancia en México.

Report
***The situation of violence related to drugs in Mexico from 2006 to 2017*, ITESO Jesuit University of Guadalajara (2018)**

The enormous dimensions of the violence that is experienced in Mexico and the characteristics of the armed groups involved have led different analysts to consider whether the situation Mexico faces could be described as "internal armed conflict." It is undoubtedly a necessary reflection, not only because of the academic and legal challenges it entails but also because its findings should determine the humanitarian response to this situation, clarify which rules govern the behavior of the different armed actors, minimize the suffering of people and debug responsibilities.

For now, the debate over whether the crisis in security and human rights could be described or not as armed conflict has generated relatively few studies. This analysis, developed by the International Humanitarian Law Clinic of the Leiden University at the request of the Comisión Mexicana de Defensa y Promoción de los Derechos Humanos (CMDPDH) and published by the Western Institute of Technology and Higher Education of the Jesuit University of Guadalajara, tries to reverse this trend.

Based on the application of international humanitarian law and available empirical evidence, this study concludes that in Mexico there is an internal war in the legal sense of the term. According to the researchers, violence in the country has reached levels of sufficient intensity while criminal groups have shown the level of organization necessary to describe the situation in Mexico as a non-international armed conflict.

Platform
Drugs: Policies and violence (Drogas: Políticas y violencias)

This transmedia platform created by Casa Amèrica Catalunya aims to contribute to the reflection on the processes of regularization and control over the production, traffic and

consumption of narcotic drugs in Latin America. It provides insight, from different points of view, on a complex issue with a multiplicity of ties and nuances, that is particular relevant in Mexico.

It is a proposal that seeks to "revise and rebuild traditional narratives and aims to generate other approaches that pay special attention to the regularization of agents that are not part of criminal structures, the production of plants, the therapeutic uses of drugs, the legislative processes and present the main actors of processes of transformation that are being developed in different countries of the region".

The platform has testimonies, texts, photographs and illustrations of people of recognized prestige in the academic, journalistic, political or cultural fields such as Ricardo Lagos, Araceli Manjón-Cabeza Olmeda, Ernesto Samper, Ana Lilia Pérez, Rodrigo Uprimny, Hector Abad Faciolince, Laura Retrepo or Marcela Turatti.

The project gives continuity to the international seminar "Drugs, policies and violence. From the global consensus to new approaches" that Casa Amèrica Catalunya and ICIP jointly organized on October 23 and 24, 2018, in Barcelona.

Documentary
***All of me*, by Arturo González Villaseñor (2014)**

The documentary *All of me* (*Llévate mis amores*) brings us closer to the solidarity of a group of women with the thousands of migrants who cross Mexico every year in search of a better future in the United States.

The prolonged political, economic, social, environmental and security crises in Central America have pushed thousands of people every year to cross Mexico with hopes of reaching the US border. Many of them choose to cross the country through the railway lines, illegally climbing to trains that bring them, little by little, closer to their destination. But on this trip they run the risk of being injured by the trains, when they fall or when they try to climb to them, while at the same time they are vulnerable to mafias and corrupt policeman who take advantage of their precarious situation.

From the town of La Patrona, in Veracruz, they have been watching trains filled with migrants for years. Moved by empathy and without asking permission from institutions or governments, a group of 14 women organized themselves to support them by sharing their scarce resources. Since 1995, *Las Patronas* cook and prepare food that they throw to the migrants to support them in their dangerous journey when they see a train passing at high speed. “I had found my service, so we began our work along the railway tracks. Not at church, on the tracks. It’s what we do”.

The documentary and the work of *Las Patronas* show how popular initiatives respond, with the scarce resources available to them and in a self-managed way, to humanitarian crises that governments do not know or do not intent to address.

INTERVIEW

Interview with Nashieli Ramírez, President of the Human Rights Commission of Mexico City

Eugènia Riera
ICIP

Nashieli Ramírez, President of the Human Rights Commission of Mexico City

Nashieli Ramírez has a long history as a social activist and human rights defender, with an emphasis on the care of children and adolescents. At the end of 2017, she was elected president of the Human Rights Commission of Mexico City, where she is working intensely to turn around a harsh reality marked by multiple forms of violence: more than 1,800 homicides; 2,300 offences by organised crime and nearly 4,000 disappearances, according to 2018 data. Multiple forms of violence that also have their roots in poverty and a lack of opportunities for children and adolescents.

In a context of very high levels of violence and serious human rights abuses, what are the Commission's priorities?

When we talk about peace building, we are talking about the promotion and protection of human rights, and nonviolent conflict resolution. In that sense we have a specific area of work in our field, of education focused on children and adolescents. When we say that children are subjects of law, we are affirming that they are social citizens from the moment they are born and that we are not going to accept minimalist visions based on charitable assistance. This agenda, which includes the Convention on the Rights of the Child, allows you to have a broad vision of rights. It is an extremely revolutionary vision concerning the perceptions of today's world and implies a cultural revolution

similar to the revolution in the viewpoint with respect to women.

Safeguarding the rights of children and other vulnerable groups was one of the priorities that you highlighted when you were elected as the new president of the Commission. What form exactly is this attention taking?

What we do is to demand that the authorities guarantee rights for these groups, because their situation of vulnerability, extreme marginalisation and discrimination means the State must accept them as groups requiring priority attention. Our focus is on the attitude of the state, and in this case it is about achieving more visibility and more substantial actions. We're talk about boys, girls, adolescents, young people... but also about women, because if we want to achieve a significant cultural change we have to work to put masculinities into question. And these vulnerable groups also include those living in the street, those with sexual diversity, with disabilities, deprived of liberty, among the most important groups.

" We demand that the authorities guarantee rights for vulnerable groups, because their situation of extreme marginalisation and discrimination means the State must accept them as groups requiring priority attention "

Of the almost 40 million Mexican children and youth, almost half live in poverty (91% in indigenous communities) according to UNICEF data. And 60% of children under 14 have experienced some type of violence. Is the culture of violence deeply rooted in Mexico?

The first thing we can see from the poverty data is that social policies that are directed only at adults do not have a direct impact on children. The benefits that an adult receives are not automatically reflected in children if you do not have a specific orientation on them. Here the important fact is the comparison between adults and

children living in poverty: the rate of poverty is 10 percentage points higher among children than among adults. Children and adolescents are more vulnerable to falling into poverty than adults, and this requires us to look again at where we are.

Secondly, according to the United Nations, violence against children and adolescents is present basically in the whole world, and the place of greatest violence is the family. In Mexico, and worldwide, we continue to have a deep-rooted habit of educating, above all, using violent blows and methods that do not really encourage alternative ways of resolving conflicts, for example though valuing dialogue and communication above the exercise of violence. In this aspect, Mexico is in the same line as most of its neighbouring countries.

So what would be the specificity of Mexico?

Where I think we have a specific problem is that, in many parts of the country, and also within Mexico City, there is an increase in violence in the community. Studies tell us that boys and girls no longer go out into the street. We exclude them from public space because the environment outside is so highly charged with violence. This has an impact on many other things: your right to play, to public space and to being safe. There are also organised crime groups on the streets that take advantage of this situation.

In this context of violence, impunity and the lack of truth and justice are a constant factor in Mexico. Does this situation call into question the rule of law in Mexico?

Yes. And we have to work to change this. In the case of Mexico City, a committee of experts is working on the transformation of the Attorney General's Office into a General Prosecutor's Office, and there is already a fairly strong diagnosis of recognition in terms of impunity and corruption, which has shown up a crisis in the system. The lack of due process leads to us not being able to access truth and justice. And there are many cases of victims of human rights violations that have to do with this lack of due process and access to justice. Now the transformation into the General Prosecutor's Office opens a new logic for justice.

“ Cities will determine the future of the world and the great strategies of prevention and peace building have to come from a local level ”

Do reforms such as the new Victims’ Law or the Political Constitution of Mexico City also open a new path for the construction of peace?

We are inaugurating a new Constitution, one that has the most guarantees, one that gives us a very good framework for action and governance. In terms of local governments throughout the region, the effort we are making is around how to establish laws and programs that are in line with this Constitution. Cities will determine the future of the world and the great strategies of prevention and peace building have to come from a local level. Regarding how we attend to victims of violence, we are launching our Victims’ Commission, while the Local Commissioner for the Search for Persons has just been appointed. The institutional structures are being put in place to enable us to advance a little.

With the new national presidency of López Obrador, do you think that new opportunities for peace building have been opened up?

At a national level, work is being done on the violence prevention system and on security reform, and at a local level we are working on similar lines. As a Commission we are accompanying part of the government’s strategy. For example, in the violence prevention strategy, work is being done on the creation of what we call “pillars”, which aim for the incorporation of young people into education and employment, following the experiences of Medellín or Bogotá in Colombia. But it’s not just about working with children and young people. In Mexico we won’t be able to move forward if we don’t also work with the police. The great security crisis we have includes a great crisis in the police force, so at the same time there has to be a transformation of the police force. And we are working for that, with a proposal of training modules for police on human rights, on the rational use of force... because the security forces are one part of what we

have to rebuild.

“ We will manage to get our children, adolescents and young people to resolve their conflicts in a different way, to live happily in another way ”

The Commission has also become known for helping the migrant caravans, an expression of nonviolent struggle. Is Mexico City an example of a welcoming city, of refuge?

Yes, totally. In this sense the local response has been different from the restrictive response that is being given in the country as a whole, because the city has a local commitment to defending human rights, to humanitarian aid. Since the end of March we have not received large caravans, but this does not mean that we are not working with this population. The city’s network of hostels, which is operated by civil society organisations, receives between 30 and 50 migrants a week, and there is coordination between the Commission, the authorities and the organisations.

Is there a place for optimism despite the harsh reality of the country?

A table is being established that makes us hopeful but it’s not yet operating as such. Over recent months there have been changes at an institutional level that are going through readjustments, for example, some concerning nomenclature. Here we no longer have a Secretariat of Public Security, but a Secretariat of Citizens’ Security, and the city’s Law for Citizens’ Security was passed recently. Those of us who are dedicated to defending and guaranteeing rights, if we can’t live with hope we’d be better off doing something else. We can build a better country, we will manage to get our children, adolescents and young people to resolve their conflicts in a different way, to live happily in another way. We will continue working in the construction of a fairer world for everyone.

Photograph by Tania Victoria / Secretaría de Cultura de la Ciudad de México

SOBRE L'ICIP

News, activities and publications about the ICIP

ICIP
International Catalan Institute for Peace

International Forum on Peacebuilding in Mexico

With the of disseminating, analyzing and debating the peacebuilding opportunities in Mexico, ICIP organizes the first International Forum on Peacebuilding in Mexico which will take place at the Center for Contemporary Culture of Barcelona (CCCB) on 25, 26 and 27 September 2019.

The event, organized by ICIP together with Taula per Mèxic and the Mexican organization SERAPAZ, will be attended by more than 40 people from the academic world, social activism, institutions, culture and journalism.

Speakers include representatives of the Collective of Analysis of Security with Democracy (CASEDE), CIDOB, the Oaxaca Consortium for Parliamentary Dialogue, El Colegio de la Frontera Norte, Servicio Paz y Justicia (SERPAJ), the Center for Research and Higher Studies in Social Anthropology (CIESAS), the Mexican Commission for the Defense and Promotion of Human Rights, the Institute for Integrated Transitions and the Kellog Institute for International Studies of the University of Notre Dame. The Forum will also feature the participation of human rights defenders, threatened journalists and relatives of victims of forced disappearance.

The Forum will coincide with the fifth anniversary of the forced disappearance of 43 students from Ayotzinapa, in Iguala; a memorial ceremony with relatives of the disappeared will be held in parallel with the discussion panels.

Last publications

– *Els pacifistes som els realistes*, collection of texts by Vicent Martínez Guzmán. Published in Catalan by the ICIP and Angle Editorial in “Clàssics de la pau i la noviolència” collection.