Ayotzinapa
Truth and the Economy of Mourning
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ABSTRACT This article offers an analysis of some of the reasons why the unveiling of the truth in the Ayotzinapa case, in which forty-three students enrolled in a rural teaching school in Mexico were forcibly taken and then disappeared, must not be postponed. To make a strong case for mourning as a political right, the article first analyzes Hannah Arendt’s argument according to which only forgiveness can change a violent course of action, but in order for forgiveness to be offered, the crime to be pardoned must be precisely named. The article then shows how Judith Butler’s politics of mourning crosses paths with Arendt’s valorization of truth in politics, because both argue for the centrality of reality testing in mourning. In order to add to Butler’s account of collective mourning, the article concludes by returning to Freud’s psychoanalytic account of the work of mourning, where factual truth proves indispensable to the construction of any history.

KEYWORDS Ayotzinapa case, collective mourning, right to mourn, forced disappearance

Truth, though powerless and always defeated in a head-on clash with the powers that be, possesses a strength of its own: whatever those in power may contrive, they are unable to discover or invent a viable substitute for it. Persuasion and violence can destroy truth, but they cannot replace it.
—Hannah Arendt, “Truth and Politics” (1967)

... como un sufrimiento que se prolonga en el tiempo.
[... like a suffering that is extended in time.]

Toward a Right to Mourn
It has been more than four years since the disappearance of forty-three students enrolled in the Escuela Normal Raúl Isidro Burgos, better known as the Escuela Normal Rural de Ayotzinapa (Ayotzinapa Rural Teachers’ College). Between sundown on
September 26 and dawn on September 27, 2014, around one hundred students in the teachers’ college, located in Ayotzinapa, in the state of Guerrero, Mexico, left their school, heading toward the tollbooth outside Iguala. The students went there to raise funds (botear in Mexico) and to “take over” or commandeer (tomar in Spanish) several buses because they wanted to travel to Mexico City to take part in the events commemorating the massacre of students that took place in Tlatelolco on October 2, 1968.

A few days before this, these students had commandeered two buses in collaboration with three bus drivers, and they traveled in these buses toward Iguala. At the tollbooth, a group of five or six students took over another bus bound for Iguala. The driver of this new bus asked the students to accompany him to leave the passengers in the city of Iguala. After that, he said he would drive with them to their school and then to Mexico City. However, the bus driver did not make either of these stops. Instead, he drove to the central bus station in Iguala. Once the other passengers got off the bus, the driver locked the students in. As soon as these students realized what was happening, they contacted their classmates, who, riding the two other buses they had previously taken, immediately went to rescue their peers. When the classmates finally managed to get the imprisoned students out of the bus in which they had been enclosed, they decided to commandeer three more buses from the station. The Grupo Interdisciplinario de Expertas y Expertos Independientes (GIEI, Interdisciplinary Group of Independent Experts), appointed by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, was granted access to the bus station’s recordings from that night, so that it was possible to verify that the students took three more buses and left the station in five different vehicles.

The municipal police arrived at the station as soon as the students left and then followed them along the federal highway toward their school. One of the buses took a different route and another went ahead. At this point, police began to shoot, first in the air and then at the three remaining buses. When the police began shooting, the students got off the buses, some of them yelling, “Don’t shoot, we are students!” The police beat some of the students and shot others; the students defended themselves with stones. Meanwhile, the bus that had gone ahead was chased by at least two police patrols. Once they reached this bus, the police assaulted the students with pepper spray and tear gas and beat them. Eventually, the police also caught up with the last bus, which had taken a detour moments before. The police also attacked the students riding in this bus.

Felipe Flores Velázquez, Iguala’s municipal chief of police at the time, confirmed the detention of the students who did not manage to escape. Flores Velázquez is the cousin of the former mayor of Iguala, José Luis Abarca, who is now in prison for corruption and other crimes, but not for the disappearance of the forty-three normalistas, known as “the 43.”

The rest of the night in Iguala was bloody and brutal. Six people were executed, 3 of them students, including a young man whose body appeared the next
day in an uninhabited spot and showed clear signs of torture. At least 40 people were injured, counting two students who survived but suffered permanent damage to their health. The 43 are still missing. In all, more than 180 people were direct victims of human rights violations that night, and about 700 people, including the relatives of the aggrieved, were indirect victims.

Testimonies provided by witnesses and survivors confirm that some of the police who attacked the students used military equipment that is not standard for state police in Guerrero. Witnesses also told the GIEI that the guns used by the police that night looked like they belonged to riot police, that some of them were dressed in black and wearing hoods covering their faces; that is, they did not look like local or state police.

Consulting the recordings of the Centro de Comando, Control, Comunicaciones y Cómputo (C-4), the GIEI verified that federal forces monitored the students' whole journey and that these forces were aware of what was happening.6 When the municipal police began shooting at the students and again when their unexplained pursuit of the buses began, federal authorities were aware, as were the state and municipal police forces.

On November 7, 2014, Jesús Murillo Karam, then procurador general de la república (PGR, attorney general of Mexico), held a press conference during which he presented the results of the official investigation of the case. Offensively, he presented his report as the “historical truth.”7 He declared that the police who had arrested and attacked the students from Ayotzinapa had acted under the orders of the then mayor of Iguala, José Luis Abarca, among other authorities. Murillo added that these forces had colluded with criminal organizations and that they had confused the victims with members of Los Rojos, a drug trafficking cartel and rival of the Guerreros Unidos, both based in the Mexican state of Guerrero. Murillo also claimed that the municipal police delivered forty-three students to members of the Guerreros Unidos, who then burned them in the municipal dump of Cocula and later spread their ashes in the San Juan River.8 However, weeks later, researchers from the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM, National Autonomous University of Mexico) determined that burning forty-three bodies in that dump would have been physically impossible. In addition, the GIEI countered Murillo's version of events, agreeing with the findings of the UNAM investigators and with the findings of the Argentine Forensic Anthropology Team.

The GIEI delivered its first report at the School of Ayotzinapa in September 2015. Here, in addition to refuting the version of events according to which the bodies of the 43 had been burned in the dump of Cocula, they demonstrated with videos recorded in the bus station that the students from Ayotzinapa had traveled in five buses and not in four, as the PGR report had claimed. The PGR had access to these same videos, and the reason for its omission is unknown.9 The government agreed, before the relatives of the 43 and the people of Mexico, to take the GIEI
report into account. But from September 2015 to the last day of former president Enrique Peña Nieto's administration, the government did not pursue the new lines of investigation that the GIEI report opened, nor did it show any interest or political will to do so. Although the case is not closed, the former government acted as though it were. In December 2015, Peña Nieto called for reconciliation in the state of Guerrero at a public event and then asked the Mexican people, who still did not know the full truth, to “overcome the pain.” The government of Mexico has not presented a new report since the unfortunate and offensive press conference, during which the audience could also hear the attorney general say, “I’m tired.”

Despite its pledge to the people of Mexico and the relatives of the 43 to continue the investigation, Peña Nieto's administration not only acted as if the case were closed; it also assumed that the 43 were killed. Most likely they were, but their relatives and the people of Mexico need to know what exactly happened and where their bodies are, whether they are living or dead. Mexico needs to know the factual truth in order to construct our true history, to understand what happened, and to devise political and humanitarian strategies that might prevent these violent events from being repeated. The relatives of the 43 need to know the fate of their children to be able to mourn them. On April 8, 2019, the new government of Mexico headed by Andrés Manuel López Obrador signed an agreement with the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, that it will investigate and resolve the case of the 43. We will be watching to see that it does.

Confronted with the organized forgetting of the disappearance of the 43, we need to continue to remember them, and we need to demand that their case be resolved. Forced disappearance is a crime that specifically denies access to the truth to the victims' families and to the public sphere. In this case, disclosure depends on the Mexican federal justice system. Nevertheless, the question is, as Brad Evans formulates it, “How can we do some justice to the memory of these young men?” What follows is an effort to address this question. In this essay, I offer a theoretical analysis of some of the reasons why the unveiling of the truth in this case must not be postponed. But this essay is also an exercise in memorialization. The struggle for truth is uniquely categorical in cases of disappearance since the protracted search for lost loved ones leads to an unnecessary “suffering that is extended in time,” indefinitely. This is a form of state cruelty, and it calls for a forceful response. For this reason, I will seek to make a strong case for mourning as a political right.

In order to do so, I will first analyze Hannah Arendt’s 1967 New Yorker article, “Truth and Politics,” which argues that only forgiveness can change a violent course of action, but that in order for forgiveness to be offered, the crime must be precisely named. I then show where Judith Butler’s politics of mourning crosses paths with Arendt’s valorization of truth in politics, precisely in that both emphasize the centrality of reality testing for mourning. In order to add to Butler’s account of col-
lective mourning, I will also focus on Freud’s psychoanalytic perspective where the place of factual truth in the construction of a history is to some extent the same whether we are treating a patient or a collectivity:

If we consider mankind as a whole and substitute it for the single human individual, we discover that it too has developed delusions which are inaccessible to logical criticism and which contradict reality. If, in spite of this, they are able to exert an extraordinary power over men, investigation leads us to the same explanation as in the case of the single individual. They owe their power to the element of historical truth which they have brought up from the repression of the forgotten and primal past.15

Building on Freud’s account of mourning as a psychic mechanism that reorganizes the libidinal economy and that requires reality testing, Butler presents an account of collective mourning as a political demand, an account that resonates with Arendt’s claim that truth is central in the construction of a democratic and just public sphere. Butler’s philosophical conceptualization of life as worthy of mourning and grieving leads to an ontology of vulnerability that refers neither to essences nor to inherent characteristics and is inseparable from social and political interpretations; in other words, Butler identifies a differentiation in the way lives are valued. This ontology should not be thought of in classically metaphysical terms, for it functions biopolitically—as, paradoxically, an effect and an expression of the socio-political realm. For Butler, it seems that communities are organized such that certain lives are repeatedly abjected, and this is a form of exclusion. This expulsion leads to the socio-political creation of lives that are not worthy of protection or defense and that are therefore not regarded as “grievable” in the dominant symbolic frame. Analyzing the workings of vulnerability and abjection in Mexico and considering the precarious lives of the disappeared—Indigenous people and people of color (moreros in Mexico) together, who were also students in a school that has a long history of opposing the government16—I will show as well that the 43 suffered from racism and classism that in part explains why they remain “disappeared.”

The loss of the 43 must be recognized by the Mexican state as publicly grievable, and for that to happen, there must be a dedicated investigation, and these efforts must be supported by social and financial means. In other words, the truth must first come out in order for mourning to occur.

**Truth in Politics and Collective Mourning**

The Ayotzinapa case must be constructed in public discourse and space, and not simply in the way any other judicial and legal proceeding would, because the local and state police forces, as well as the National Army, are suspected to have been involved either in the crime or its cover-up.
As Arendt claims, divergent views can be regarded as legitimate, provided that they respect factual truth. This view of reality is clearly consistent with Nietzsche's idea that facts are indeed interpretations if we take into account their historical and cultural emergence: "There are no 'facts-in-themselves,'" Nietzsche writes, "for a sense must always be projected into them before there can be 'facts.'”

We can debate how best to "name" each of the successive events that occurred between the moment that a number of students boarded a passenger bus in the toll booth of the city of Iguala and the moment of their disappearance, but given the existence of the recordings made by the C-4, which the GIEI managed to get from the authorities themselves, we cannot deny that the young students were terrified and tried to escape from the persecution of armed men. Nor can we deny that we are dealing with a state crime, as is proven by the same archive of recordings, the testimonies of victims and witnesses, and official reports. Together these sources demonstrate that those men with guns did not protect or merely confine the victims. Rather, their aim was to keep one of the buses that the students were riding from leaving their jurisdiction. Given that there is evidence that the state was involved in these criminal acts, a public judicial investigation becomes all the more urgent and necessary. If the police forces whose task is to protect the rights and lives of citizens and the country’s inhabitants in general are precisely those who attack and who may be feared, the government must rebuild confidence in the integrity, accountability, and mission of these institutions. National security provides no justification for the lack of transparency when government forces are shown to have been involved with criminal activities, for the role of the government is exactly what is at issue here; in cases such as these, clearing up the facts is most important, even when that requires an investigation into the government's own actions. Otherwise, the legitimacy of the state is called into question. Only in public, after the construction of history in public discourse, will it be possible to give a legitimate and credible account of the fate of the forty-three students from Ayotzinapa.

The unveiling and recognition of truth has positive political consequences, but an ethical imperative is also operative, which, every time it is followed, has favorable effects in the public sphere. As Arendt articulates it:

No human world destined to outlast the short life span of mortals within it will ever be able to survive without men willing to do what Herodotus was the first to undertake consciously—namely, λέγειν τα éοντα (legein ta eonta), to say what is. No permanence, no perseverance in existence, can even be conceived of without men willing to testify to what is and appears to them because it is.
Arendt’s brief essay on the place of truth in politics was inspired, or rather compelled, by the misrepresentation of the facts surrounding Adolf Eichmann’s trial and the misinterpretation of her book *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. In “Truth and Politics,” which, as she herself describes it, is more political than philosophical, she distinguishes among three types of truths: the scientific or rational, the philosophical, and the factual. All three are susceptible to falsification, she explains, but the one that is most vulnerable in the face of a liar is factual truth since “the hallmark of factual truth is that its opposite is neither error nor illusion nor opinion, not one of which reflects upon personal truthfulness, but the deliberate falsehood, or lie.”

This does not mean that error is not at stake in this type of truth. On the contrary, as Arendt clarifies, this is a characteristic that factual truth shares with the other types of truth. But when it comes to facts, there the alternative of perjury is always available. Moreover, one of the central issues that Arendt contends with here is that, in politics, the search for and unveiling of truth is something we cannot abandon, something nonnegotiable and indispensable for political life.

We could analyze this unveiling in many different ways, but one is fundamental for the purpose of this essay: truth is essential and irreplaceable not only for the construction of a coherent narrative, but also for any account that seeks to withstand the passage of time without—to put it in psychoanalytic terms—the infiltration of symptoms; the irruption of the repressed, forgotten, or excluded from history; and the repetition of trauma or melancholia. As I said earlier, I venture to reflect on the Ayotzinapa case from a psychoanalytic perspective because the place of factual truth in the construction of a history is to some extent the same whether we are treating a patient or a collectivity. Both working-through and the construction of history depend on the knowledge of truth, which allows for the opening of new horizons, that is, hope for more livable lives. As I will explain, mourning is the psychic operation in which we acknowledge loss; this recognition is, first, the condition of possibility for investing our libido in new loved objects (objects that, according to Freud, can be persons, places, or projects) and, second, a way out of melancholia.

From Freud’s analysis of mourning and melancholia (1917), we learn that the crucial difference between these two psychic phenomena is that mourning takes place when the grieving subject knows what has been lost and that not knowing this sentences the subject to a melancholic condition: “this would suggest that melancholia is in some way related to an object-loss which is withdrawn from consciousness, in contradistinction to mourning, in which there is nothing about the loss that is unconscious.” Thus, the forced disappearance of those whose lives have presumably been taken opens a space of uncertainty about the fate of the loved ones that leads to the denial of death and a cruel hope for finding them alive.
Since the crime of disappearance quite literally negates access to the truth of what has happened, relatives resist mourning until the truth is revealed. From this it follows that truth is indispensable when it comes to social and political justice. The withholding of facts forecloses the future for the friends and families of the disappeared and condemns them to an indefinite temporality of unrelenting pain. Therefore, the authorities responsible for the unveiling of truth force the relatives into a melancholic state until the facts are known.

Similarly, Butler argues that, socially and politically, we are allowed to grieve some lives whereas others do not count as grievable. There are epistemological frames and social ontologies according to which some lives are more valued than others. The collective mourning of all lives is in this sense a political act. The collective and public exclamation “¡Vivos se los llevaron, vivos los queremos!” (They took them alive, we want them alive!) was first heard in Argentina in 1977 during the dictatorship of President Jorge Rafael Videla, when it was a chant used by mothers in response to the all-too-frequent disappearance and unjust detention of mainly young dissident men. Later, in Mexico, the Comité Eureka, an organization formed to protest political disappearances during what is known as the Guerra Sucia in Mexico during the 1970s, also used that demand for the same purpose. It now constitutes the impossible demand that the relatives of the forty-three students of Ayotzinapa and Mexican civil society use in demonstrations to demand the unveiling of the truth regarding the fate of these young men. This is an impossible demand, where “impossibility” refers not to the absurd but instead to a political claim for an ideal of full and collective mourning.

Collective mourning has two powerful effects: first, the reopening of a future that offers possibilities for life in the aftermath of loss; and, second, an intervention that reverses the effects of the sedimented ontology according to which the lost lives did not matter. In other words, collective mourning has the power of changing the unjust and violent biopolitics that dictate that some lives are more grievable than others. As Miriam Jerade suggests, “An ontology of vulnerability demands being aware of the ways in which frames produce a differential norm of the human, and at the same time calls for providing social protection in the face of precarity to diminish unjust distribution.”

According to Freud, the work of mourning a lost loved object is the only psychic process that dissipates suffering. This work of mourning is not an attempt to forget the loss; rather, it seeks to redirect the libidinal energy detached from the lost object into new ones. Following Butler, we can say that collective mourning leads to the same outcome, but we should also point out that a new libidinal investment (an ability to love again) might be the only way to end the violence or excessive pain that follows a loss. The other possible response is melancholia, which leads to vicious aggression (often directed against the self) and disproportionate grief. In
Butler’s words, “The revolt in melancholia can be distilled by marshalling aggression in the service of mourning, but also, necessarily, of life.”

In The Human Condition, Arendt argues that forgiveness is the only performatative action that can not only interrupt violence but also shut it down. However, forgiveness is at the same time the acknowledgement of painful facts. This coincides with Freud’s account of mourning since only the recognition that the object has been lost sets the work of mourning in motion, whereas the negation of the loss, as Freud explains, leaves the subject stuck in a melancholic circuit. This means that the recognition of reality in mourning, like the necessity of truth for achieving forgiveness in Arendtian terms, interrupts a melancholic paralysis by opening up the horizons foreclosed by psychic shutdown, which threatens to lead to suicide.

Although Freud does not say much about the temporality of melancholia in his work, we can infer that it is marked by a repetition compulsion if we analyze the melancholic’s withdrawal from the world and psychic paralysis as well as the unconscious nature of the loss in melancholia. In metapsychological terms, for Freud, memory traces are paths that the psyche takes in order to divest itself of excitation (as, from a psychoanalytical perspective, pleasure is the release of tension) or to satisfy needs and desires. From an economic perspective, there is a psychic inertia, a tendency to “keep the quantity of excitation present in it as low as possible or at least to keep it constant.” That is, the psyche saves energy by following old memory traces. Thus, we could say that the psyche is a conservative organization and that the repetition compulsion, as opposed to the opening of new memory traces, is the dominant tendency of the Freudian psyche. This would make repetition its dominant temporality. Thus, we can understand why psychopathology in Freudian terms mainly constitutes resistance to a new and unknown destiny. Freud writes about this resistance to the future in “Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through.”

In this technical paper, Freud explains that repetition is a mode of remembering and in “Mourning and Melancholia,” he writes that in melancholia, after the loss of a loved object, its existence is psychically prolonged. It is important not to forget that it is the psychic quality of the loss—that is, whether it is conscious or unconscious—that lets us distinguish between the work of mourning and melancholia. And the compulsion to repeat is, again, characteristic of the unconscious mind. Freud notes, “It is possible to recognize the dominance in the unconscious mind of a ‘compulsion to repeat.’” Therefore, as long as the loss remains unconscious, the psyche will pathologically keep going back to the memory traces left behind when the object had not been lost, and its pain will be extended in time.

As long as the truth about the fate of the forty-three students from Ayotzinapa is not revealed, the relatives’ loss is in this sense unconscious. I understand the difficulty of thinking of this specific loss as unconscious, but let us not forget that,
for Freud, what is unconscious in melancholia is not the loss of the object but what has been lost with it: “The [melancholic] patient cannot consciously perceive what he has lost either. This, indeed, might be so even if the patient is aware of the loss which has given rise to his melancholia, but only in the sense that he knows whom he has lost but not what he has lost in him.”31 Consider the agony that the relatives of the 43 must continue to suffer as they imagine different but all horrifying scenarios in which their sons were tortured and probably killed.

Freud describes psychopathology in “Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through” as follows: “The patient does not remember anything of what he has forgotten and repressed, but acts it out.”32 Repetition compulsion thus entails going back over traumatic memory traces and reliving the pain that they cause. Melancholia is itself a repetition—a performative way of remembering, but a painful one.33 And acknowledging the truth is the only way out of this circuit of excessive pain. Government forces are responsible for the unveiling of truth that is the condition of possibility for the reality testing that mourning needs to work through the loss. This implies that the melancholic condition currently affecting the relatives of the 43 is an imposed condition and a matter of political and social justice.

We cannot afford to be naive in political terms, but neither can we be naive when a philosophical conception of truth is at stake. Thus, the truth about which I write throughout this essay does not refer to the logical truth of the sort that Alfred Tarski considers, in the sense of material adequacy (it is true that P if and only if P). Here the truth is thus opposed to the lie, understood as an intention to deceive or mislead.34 In politics, it is essential not to falsify the facts, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, not to cause confusion or misperception. In this sense, it is always outrageous when a politician weighs whether to unveil the truth. As Arendt notes at the beginning of her essay, the Latin adage “Fiat justitia, et pereat mundus” (Let justice be done though the world may perish) resonates with Kant’s claim that “justice shall prevail, even though all the rascals in the world should perish as a result” and rests on assumptions that Arendt questions:

It will therefore come as something of a surprise that the sacrifice of truth for the survival of the world would be more futile than the sacrifice of any other principle or virtue. For while we may refuse even to ask ourselves whether life would still be worth living in a world deprived of such notions as justice and freedom, the same, curiously, is not possible with respect to the seemingly so much less political idea of truth.35

Then again, why is it that, at least from a psychoanalytic perspective, history cannot be constructed on the basis of deception? Why does it become impossible to reconstruct a psychic narrative on the basis of lies?
To give an answer, if only a limited answer, to these complex questions, it is essential to understand the temporality of the facts or the time of truth. In the public sphere, it is impossible for all of us to witness an event firsthand, and even if we were all able to do so, no one subject's experience would be identical to another's. This is why, on the one hand, interpretation is fundamental and defending the just and truthful interpretation in public is so vital, but, on the other, publicly debating different interpretations is crucial to building a democratic space. Turning to what Derrida describes as the economy of the trace sheds light on this matter.

For Derrida, writing is the ontological phenomenon that gives rise to singularity. However, since writing is an effect of the difference between two or more forces, where the stronger marks the other—but only if the weaker can resist the intrusion—then every inscription as singularity is the trace of the other. Derrida crosses out the word *origin* because the genesis of any singularity is not something pure. Furthermore, if writing is a political phenomenon insofar as it is the product of a confrontation between differently organized forces, we cannot think of the trace as something that occurs once and for all or as a closed and finished text. Every trace is always open to rewriting and therefore to alteration and even destruction: “Traces thus produce the space of their inscription only by acceding to the period of their erasure. From the beginning, in the ‘present’ of their first impression, they are constituted by the double force of repetition and erasure, legibility and illegibility.” It is because of this feature of the trace, sign, or inscription that resistance in politics is indispensable. It is not only philosophically critical but also politically urgent not to ignore that, if we carefully analyze the economy of writing, it reveals that a trace is a trace if and only if it can be erased: “The trace can only be a trace only if its presence is irremediably eluded in it, from its initial promise, and only if it constitutes itself as the possibility of absolute erasure. An unerasable trace is not a trace.” To ignore this is dangerously to claim that there is always a remainder—as if annihilation were not a distinct possibility. The remainder—in the Derridean sense of *restance*—should not be romanticized, especially when the erasure is political and public. In such a case, the possibility of complete annihilation should be thoroughly contemplated because it calls for collective responsibility.

For her part, Arendt, at the end of “Truth and Politics,” does not forget the virtues of politics. After all, politics has no essence; it is a practice that can converge with both ethics and perversion. But the politics of the truthful woman or man is a “great and dignified” practice, according to Arendt:

I have dealt with politics as though I, too, believed that all public affairs were ruled by interest and power, that there would be no political realm at all if we were not bound to take care of life's necessities. The reason for this deformation is that factual truth
clashes with the political only on this lowest level of human affairs, just as Plato’s philosophical truth clashed with the political on the considerably higher level of opinion and agreement. From this perspective, we remain unaware of the actual content of political life—of the joy and the gratification that arise out of being in company with our peers, out of acting together and appearing in public, out of inserting ourselves into the world by word and deed, thus acquiring and sustaining our personal identity and beginning something entirely new.39

To construct history in an honest way fundamentally means to do so democratically, that is, where nothing—no one—is excluded, disavowed, distorted, misrepresented, or falsified. Thus, the task is to build a narrative of facts. Yes, as was said earlier, following Nietzsche, facts are interpretations, but we must still recognize that, first, interpretation names phenomena that break into the world and that, second, it must be a collective and, again, a democratic practice. Therefore, the reconstruction of facts has to be a political undertaking, that is, a public one.

Factual truth is also a construction that must be formulated in the field of public speech. In Arendt’s words:

Factual truth... is always related to other people: it concerns events and circumstances in which many are involved; it is established by witnesses and depends upon testimony; it exists only to the extent that it is spoken about, even if it occurs in the domain of privacy. It is political by nature. Facts and opinions, though they must be kept apart, are not antagonistic to each other; they belong to the same realm. Facts inform opinions, and opinions, inspired by different interests and passions, can differ widely and still be legitimate as long as they respect factual truth. Freedom of opinion is a farce unless factual information is guaranteed and the facts themselves are not in dispute. In other words, factual truth informs political thought just as rational truth informs philosophical speculation.40

Facts cannot be easily silenced because, as the truth of the unconscious, they seem to endeavor to make themselves present; however, this is not due to some mystic force, but because, as Arendt explains in “Truth and Politics,” truth has a force of its own:

That facts are not secure in the hands of power is obvious, but the point here is that power, by its very nature, can never produce a substitute for the secure stability of factual reality, which, because it is past, has grown into a dimension beyond our reach. Facts assert themselves by being stubborn, and their fragility is oddly combined with great resiliency—the same irreversibility that is the hallmark of all human action.41
In other words, people in power can impose lies or deny the facts, but they cannot substitute one fact for another; thus, the truthful woman can be confident that the analysis of the course of an action will lead her to the unveiling of truth. However, it is also important to recall the transitory temporality of the factual world because, if the eager liar arrives before us, he can erase the traces. Moreover, we know that the protection of truth will not be easy when the liar is powerful. Therefore, in these scenarios, the recovery of truth will be a battle—hopefully one that is politically just. Due to the temporality of facts—that is, due to the fact that their traces can be erased and the possibility that the narrative of the liar in power might be enforced—those who are truthful must act faster.

As we do so, however, we cannot ignore Nietzsche’s vehement statement, “Against positivism, which halts at phenomena—‘There are only facts’—I would say: No, facts is precisely what there is not, only interpretations.”42 We inhabit a semantic world in which we name things and phenomena, and in the naming or making of categories we are not doing anything other than interpreting. However, it is also important to clarify that to say that “facts” are interpretations does not mean that they are inventions in the sense of being mere fabrications or simply nonexistent or unreal. Interpretations are effects and produce effects; they are themselves “facts.” Thus, it is fundamentally important that this Nietzschean formulation not be understood as giving up on the search for truth. As he argues in his posthumous fragments, the search for truth is something we must not renounce, and although the world consists of fictions—that is, although the world is a great fiction—there are some fictions that are more real than others.43 Moreover, interpretations and fictions are social and political constructions; they are built up through public discourse. In short, then, as a collectivity, we must grasp facts through interpretation, while also acknowledging that interpretations become facts or acquire the force of facts. If what we want is a democratic public sphere, it is therefore imperative that all opinions are valued, respected, and included in political discourse and the battle for naming or categorizing.

The established accounts of the hideous events that took place on the night between September 26 and 27, 2014, in Iguala, Guerrero, show that the students of the Escuela Normal Rural de Ayotzinapa were persecuted in “a massive and indiscriminate attack, in which the authors did not hide their identities. Although they were wearing hoodies and acted during the night, these men were local policemen acting openly in the center of the city as well as at its limits.”44 The GIEI report also adds that the experts think that many witnesses remained silent because they have been terrified since the state and local police, as well as other authorities, have long colluded with organized crime and specifically with Guerreros Unidos.45
One of the most heartbreaking aspects of this terrible story is that, in the recordings of their communications, none of the four forces involved in the tragedy (local, state, and federal police, and the Mexican army) give the impression of having had any hesitation in persecuting and shooting these young men. In the recordings to which the GIEI had access, the members of these armed forces can be heard speaking clearly, without pausing, and no idea seems to interrupt or intervene in their course of action. In other words, there is no sign or even a hint of respect for their victims. What I want to suggest is that they did not think of or calculate the use of their own lethal force and did not consider the option, given that the students were possibly participating in something illicit,\(^4\) of handing them over to the local public prosecutor’s office. Moreover, the recordings attest to the total power that was exercised over those young men. As the Interdisciplinary Group writes in its report:

It is likely that among the factors behind the assault there are also derogatory stereotypes about the “ayotzinapos,” as has been noted many times and which we have even found coming from different sectors throughout our investigation. However, according to the GIEI’s judgment, this would be a facilitating factor for aggression since contempt for the other promotes violence, but this would not be a trigger for it or for the extent of violence that we see here.\(^4\)

There was nothing and no one mediating the interaction between the men in power and the students from Ayotzinapa. At least, we can conclude on the basis of all the archives and testimonies that we have that there was no time dedicated to thinking and analyzing the situation in terms of what the students were doing wrong and then proceeding accordingly. All of the armed men’s actions seemed to be intended only to protect a bus\(^4\) — and no one from any of the four security forces that were in communication, coordinating the “operation,” appeared mindful of the students’ basic human rights or the threat to their lives.

What we know so far, based on official documents that the GIEI made available from its own investigation and report, is that these young men took inter-city buses that were to be used for transportation to Mexico City, where they would have taken to the streets, ironically, to commemorate, in a collective work of mourning, the tragic Tlatelolco massacre of demonstrating students on October 2, 1968. Why is it, then, that there are no pauses in the communications among the C-4 authorities, that there is no evidence of hesitation in the obvious violations of basic human rights in which they were engaged: persecuting, detaining, and shooting unarmed people? The C-4’s recordings from that obscure and tragic night include no one voicing concerns about protecting the lives of the students or acknowledging possible abuses of power by those in the field. We cannot, and should not, forget that...
these victims were dark-skinned young Mexican men with Indigenous features—poor students, students enrolled in a rural teacher training college. They were thus perceived as easily disposable: “The Ayotzinapa students were already inserted into a hierarchy of differential importance within a country that should have been nurturing their potential instead of seeing them as people who were altogether meaningless, disposable. Within global power structures, built upon the colonial architecture in which historically Mexico has been an integral part, their value relative to the white Anglo-Saxons of European descent is painfully reduced.”

In this context, Ayotzinapa is a paradigmatic case in which—among many other phenomena including, for example, drug trafficking, the abandonment of teaching schools in Mexico, the pauperization of the state of Guerrero, and so forth—we see the hideous persistence of racism and classism, which were acted out in a dramatic fashion. The report of the GIEI reveals that those in power interpreted and treated the bodies of the students as disposable and their disappearance as something that could be disavowed. Let us repeat that the authorities actually presented as a “historical truth” the claim that the 43 were kidnapped and then burned in the dump of the town of Cocula by criminal organizations, although from the point of view of more than one respectable scientist specializing in fires, this was the least tenable of the hypotheses. These facts seem to me symptomatic of what is imaginable when it comes to disposing of bodies that possess devalued characteristics. As Evans explains, following Butler, “to ask the question of what life is publicly grieved is to also ask about the importance and value attributed to a life. Grief or its denial is therefore a political act, which opens us to various hierarchies of suffering. Furthermore, it is a point of entry into the logics of power as it exposes more fully what a society is willing to protect at all costs, against those elements of society—which, as we know in this case—can vanish without any consequence.”

Dramatically, racist and classist Mexican social hierarchies easily facilitated, in the minds of the armed men, the disavowal of the students’ basic human rights without this prompting, in the minds of the police officers who attacked them or anyone from the C-4, any resistance against the exercise of state power over them. As can be seen in this case, forced disappearance implies a denial of mourning and points to a tear in the cultural and social fabric that facilitates violence. Following Derrida, I am thinking of the social sphere as a text. According to this logic, we could also imagine a tear or breach that would enable exactly the opposite—for instance, consideration for everyone’s human rights or respect for all lives as worth protecting. A trace does not have any essence; it can be a memory of violence or of care. What I am trying to picture with this Derridean metaphor is the social memory of the historic devaluation of the lives of poor, brown-skinned, young Mexican men.
The racism and classism that Indigenous people and people of color have historically suffered in Mexico partially explain the disavowal of the human rights of the forty-three students who were disappeared by the Guerrero police forces, acting in collusion with the Mexican army. While we should not ignore the complications that drug trafficking introduces into Guerrero’s social fabric or the dense political history of the Escuela Normal Rural de Ayotzinapa, it is urgent to point out that the authorities acted as if they had absolute power over the students. It was as if the bodies of the 43 were not surrounded by the “protective shields” that would have guarded them against the prejudiced police forces. These authorities acted immediately as if there were no legal or ethical space between them—that is, without any mediation of thought or reflection upon their victims’ legal and human rights.

Against Melancholic Circuits and “Excessive” Pain

According to the Ley General de Víctimas de México (General Law of Victims of Mexico), as well as the report of the GIEI, the families of the forty-three missing students are the victims of a crime:

If enforced disappearance is a permanent crime in so far as clear and reliable information about the fate of the person is not given, his or her remains are not returned, and there is no investigation of the facts and those responsible, then, psychologically, the disappearance leads to a permanent state of suffering and incertitude that is experienced as a form of psychological torture.55

There is an enigmatic temporality of mourning, Freud explains, where the only crucial factor is actually the passing of time. What happens between loss and resignation, the mechanisms through which the absence is comprehended, the understanding of the letting go of those we love—all of this, for Freud, remains a mystery.56 In mourning, says Freud, after some time the subject withdraws the object-cathexis; it is a painful period, but it comes to an end:

Normally, respect for reality gains the day. Nevertheless its orders cannot be obeyed at once. They are carried out bit by bit, at great expense of time and cathetic energy, and in the meantime the existence of the lost object is psychically prolonged. Each single one of the memories and expectations in which the libido is bound to the object is brought up and hyper-cathected, and detachment of the libido is accomplished in respect of it. Why this compromise by which the command of reality is carried out piecemeal should be so extraordinarily painful is not at all easy to explain in terms of economics. It is remarkable that this painful unpleasure is taken as a matter of course
by us. The fact is, however, that when the work of mourning is completed the ego becomes free and uninhibited again.57

In contrast, time in melancholia seems to freeze, and pain becomes a cancerous tumor that metastasizes. The melancholic does not relinquish the object; she identifies with it: “The analogy with mourning led us to conclude that he had suffered a loss in regard to an object; what he tells us points to a loss in regard to his ego.”58 Thus, the melancholic herself becomes lost, and her pain is extended in time.

In this connection, it was excellent news that, after the Trujillo Oroza v. Bolivia case of January 26, 2000, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights concluded that withholding the truth about the fate of a missing person constitutes a form of cruel and inhumane treatment of that person’s close relatives.59 The court also concluded that the right to truth is “part of the right to reparation, so the investigation of the facts, assessment and collection of testimonies, and evaluation of the impact on victims and family are part of the best international practices and standards for the implementation of reparation measures.”60 Thus, it seems to me that the question here is why the truth about the fate of a loved one constitutes a human right or to which human right this refers. According to the Al-tajamo’ Alnasawiy Almaqdasy and Jerusalemite Women’s Coalition—a self-described “group of Women NGOs and Jerusalemite feminists from all segments of society”—it is the right to mourn the dead.61 Likewise, it is in acknowledging truth—that is, in the acceptance of reality—that Freud finds the possibility of mourning. The withholding of information not only is cruel, but also, as Butler has insisted, causes excessive pain stemming from racist hierarchies according to which some deaths are not even worthy of grief.62

From a psychoanalytic perspective, the loss of loved objects (which do not have to be people, given that we can feel attached to nations, jobs, projects, and even ideals) triggers a particular kind of libidinal economy. As Freud makes clear in “Mourning and Melancholia,” depending on reality testing—that is, on whether the subject accepts the loss at a psychical level—the outcome is either the possibility of mourning or the fate of melancholia. For Freud, the work of mourning begins if and only if the subject recognizes the loss of the loved object and what has been lost with it. This is exactly the place where the work of mourning and the melancholic state differ, and thus it becomes crucial to point out that, while grieving is an effort that comes to an end, melancholia is a circuit. Mourning is work because it leads to a transformation of energy and/or a reinvestment of the libido, as it moves from one object to another through a process that Freud refers to as “working-through.” In contrast, melancholia has no resolution, no libidinal or semantic outcome; the libido remains fixed to the lost loved object, and time comes to a halt. Therefore, we could say that the melancholic subject cannot narrate history because this requires
a reality check—first, with respect to the absence of the object and, second, with respect to temporality. Mourning implies a resignation that melancholia resists.

Hence, from a Freudian perspective, mourning cannot begin with a lie, whereas melancholia can be thought of as a circuit intended to maintain a deception in the form of the disavowal or complete foreclosure of a loss. The melancholic, says Freud, identifies herself with the lost object precisely to deny its absence and make it “live” within her. The complete withdrawal from the world, the fact that the world loses all sense and that the patient resists differentiating herself from the lost object and asserting her own life, is a staging or representation of her own death. In Freud’s words,

[T]he object-cathexis proved to have little power of resistance and was brought to an end. But the free libido was not displaced on to another object; it was withdrawn into the ego. There, however, it was not employed in any unspecified way, but served to establish an identification of the ego with the abandoned object. Thus the shadow of the object fell upon the ego, and the latter could henceforth be judged by a special agency, as though it were an object, the forsaken object. In this way an object-loss was transformed into an ego-loss and the conflict between the ego and the loved person into a cleavage between the critical activity of the ego and the ego as altered by identification.63

The state’s contempt for the lives of the forty-three students has been a perverse disavowal of their death: these students have not been worthy of grief, and their families have been denied the right to mourn. As a result, these family members have been sentenced to a melancholic staging of their own death in life.

In Precarious Life: The Power of Mourning and Violence, Butler provides an analysis of those whose lives are preconfigured as dead. What she calls the “dehumanization of certain bodies” can be read in this way, as a means by which those who are in powerful positions grant or withhold “humanity” in order to maintain their dominance. A specific, precarious body is humanized or dehumanized within discourse and through social practices. Dehumanization, of course, has violent effects where we understand “human life” as a “life worth living” and “worth grieving,” as a life recognized as equally valuable:

It is therefore not only the denial of life, but also an assault on the very idea that a meaningful life eventually finds dignity in death and its passing. Disappearance then is a form of violence against the future. It immobilizes. Through the negation of life, it openly recruits the haunting memory of ghosts in order to impose a tyranny [over] the will of the living.64
A Last Word: On Dueling

In “Constructions in Analysis” (1937), a late text, Freud asks himself what, after all the revisions its theory and practice had gone through, the task of the psychoanalyst consists of. Throughout the text, he reassures us that it is still to recover forgotten truths. But he engages in a theoretical shift, one that could almost be called a philosophical or epistemological turn, as he abandons the paradigm of interpretation as the method for the recovery of repressed material and now presents the psychoanalytic method as a matter of construction. Here he reminds us that in psychoanalysis we hear a lot about interpretation but that, in his opinion, “‘construction’ is by far the more appropriate description” of what takes place in analysis. Freud also explains that the patient very seldom manages to recover a memory, but that, nonetheless, he acquires conviction about the truth of the construction, “which achieves the same therapeutic result as a recaptured memory.”

Freud's political writings already showed the hermeneutic scope of psychoanalysis beyond the couch, but we should also consider the transformative and emancipatory power of psychoanalysis as a means of searching for collective, repressed truths and reconstructing communities’ stories.

Moreover, psychoanalysis, as a talking cure, is a practice in which speech, as narrative and historical reconstruction, or construction, at once prevents and conjures violent acting against oneself and others. It is through speech that the psychoanalytic cure comes. But we should not forget that, in Studies on Hysteria (1893–95), the very text in which Freud and Breuer call psychoanalysis a “talking cure” in talking about Anna O., Freud suggests that this therapeutic practice is not the naming of the repressed but the repetition (in discourse) of the forgotten psychic material, which, crucially, takes place in a specific frame. More than a private practice, psychoanalysis is a political task and strategy in that it promotes the performative and therapeutic power of speech. As Anna O. also said, psychoanalysis cleans chimneys, and so let us sweep the soot from public squares.

I want to insist on the necessity of thinking and designing modes of nonviolent coexistence or cohabitation, and to do so not in a romantic and naïve fashion, but in terms of what I call “dueling.” The public sphere should be one fit for battalions of speech or for swordsmen (and women) wielding words for a “talking cure”—as in the inspiring way that Anna O. referred to psychoanalysis. Ontological and political difference must be understood as the desire to assert oneself before the other in public sphere; for this is not just a natural or inherent phenomenon of the living but also an ethically desirable matter and, therefore, something that should be promoted in the political sphere.

I think of battalions of duelists because mourning and dueling are both erotic activities. On the one hand, mourning (duelo), as the time of spiritual suffering caused by a loss, implies, in both its common and psychoanalytic meanings, that,
in the end, life is affirmed. It is a period during which those of us who are still alive withdraw from the world and engage in a series of rituals to commemorate the lost loved object. It is a time during which the whole world seems to have lost, if not all of its meaning, as in melancholia, at least a very special meaning for us. On the other hand, dueling (*duelo*) defined as battle—as long as it respects rules of engagement and is not pursued unto death—entails a tension between forces that is not finally resolved, for while there is a winner, the victory does not compromise the life of the other, the opponent. Thus, if the fight is held within a discursive field, it will reproduce a democratic public sphere. Therefore, a “duelist” (*duelista*) is one figure for the democratic citizen, whose political practice is also erotic.

As Freud explains in “Mourning and Melancholia,” “although mourning involves grave departures from the normal attitude toward life, it never occurs to us to regard it as a pathological condition and to refer it to medical treatment. We rely on its being overcome after a certain lapse of time, and we look upon any interference with it as useless or even harmful.” Later, Freud argues that the reason why, after a certain amount of time, life goes on, so to speak, is essentially a puzzle, that the duration of the period of mourning is both incalculable and singular.

Responsible collective mourning cannot end in a radical erasure of the bond to the lost loved object but is, on the contrary, about making history—an honest history in which incorporation is not an option. In other words, constructing history in and through mourning implies that the loss is named and recognized. Moreover, in a Derridean sense, this would mean that history is *to come*, as we politically resist the repetition of violence. Mourning, in contrast to melancholia, implies a temporality that, at the same time as it allows history to be written, opens up the future as a horizon of multiple possibilities instead of a predefined fate. Likewise, it implies a construction of history because the loss is registered, named, and honored, whereas in melancholia there is a temporal suspension as the subject continues to resist reality; thus, the loss is either foreclosed or disavowed (or in economic psychoanalytic vocabulary, there is no withdrawal of the libido invested in the lost object).

Within the political realm, mourning involves preserving the memory of what has been lost with that absence because, as Derrida writes, what disappears in every loss is a whole possible world: “Death declares *each time the end of the world in totality, the end of every world, and each time the end of the world as a unique totality, thus irreplaceable and thus infinite*.” Yet, for better or for worse, the end of the world that each death brings about does not prevent the birth of a new one, and the way in which we reconstruct (or deconstruct) the world is a political task. Thus, mourning the end of a world in each death unveils our dependency on others, on each other.

Even though we might grieve the absence of the past—that is, something we think should still be here—the core of the work of mourning involves resignation
to the fact that, now that the object is lost, the future that was essentially bound up
with that object is lost as well. Therefore, what we grieve are mainly future possibilities that have been shot down after the loss. At the same time, mourning is the psychic and political operation that opens up new horizons. Melancholic resistance to reinvesting the libido paralyzes us, whereas mourning serves as a catalyst to free the libido, which can then be used to wage battle against injustice. As Butler argued in Mexico: “If we forget we are grieving, we become pure vessels of rage. If we forget to turn our rage into a demand for justice, we become pure destruction in the face of destruction. If we lose ourselves to sorrow, we lose the rage we need for the demand for justice and for the political future of freedom.”

Collective responsibility is thus about being duelists, and this means occupying public space to fight for justice. But this is not a battle to the death, for the task is precisely to maintain the political arena as a space of polemos—that is, as a space of tension and opposition. Likewise, in order to preserve political space, we must keep the enemy alive. The battle for justice is thus an eternal confrontation that, again, needs at least two different forces to protect the public sphere as shared. Mourning, as dueling, is the construction of history through the registration, naming, and recognition, not only of the loss, but also of what was lost with that loss. Finally, historicizing is the only practice that can prevent repetition; as mourning does, it opens up the future to unprecedented possibilities. In this sense, by not telling the truth about the fate of the forty-three missing students of Ayotzinapa, the Mexican state has taken away from the relatives of Abel García, Abelardo Vázquez, Adán Abrayan de la Cruz, Alexander Mora, Antonio Santana, Benjamín Ascencio, Bernardo Flores, Carlos Iván Ramírez, Carlos Hernández, César González, Christian Rodríguez, Christian Colón, Cutberto Ortiz, Dorian González, Emiliano de la Cruz, Everardo Rodríguez, Felipe Arnulfo, Giovanni Galindes, Israel Caballero, Israel Lugardo, Jesús Jovany Rodriguez, Jonas Trujillo, Jorge Álvarez, Jorge Anibal Cruz, Jorge Antonio Tizapa, Jorge Luis González, José Ángel Campos, José Ángel Navarrete, José Eduardo Bartolo, José Luis Luna, Jhosivani Guerrero, Julio César López, Leonel Castro, Luis Ángel Abarca, Luis Ángel Arzola, Magdaleno Lauro Villégas, Marcial Baranda, Marco Antonio Gómez, Martín Getsemany Sánchez, Mauricio Ortega, Miguel Ángel Hernández, Miguel Ángel Mendoza, and Saúl García the right to reinvent their lives—in other words, the right to a future. And while the prospect of the future might still seem disheartening, it remains better than a present of permanent and tortured paralysis.

¡Vivos se los llevaron, vivos los queremos!
They took them alive, we want them alive!
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Acknowledgments
The author wishes to thank the Programa de Apoyo para la Superación del Personal Académico at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México. The author would also like to thank the Proyecto PAPIIT 403117: “Filosofía y psicoanálisis como fronteras críticas de lo político.”

Notes
1. On June 4, 2018, Mexico was surprised by a court decision that required President Enrique Peña Nieto to pursue the investigations begun by the Grupo Interdisciplinario de Expertas y Expertos Independientes (GIEI, Interdisciplinary Group of Independent Experts), appointed by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. The court’s resolution specified that the GIEI’s report offered enough evidence to call into question the soundness and impartiality of the official state investigation. Moreover, the court ordered that the government must renew the legal proceedings in the “Ayotzinapa Case” and create a commission to investigate the “Iguala Case,” to be formed by the legal representatives of the victims, the Comisión Nacional de Derechos Humanos (National Commission on Human Rights), and the Ministerio Público de la Federación (Federal Public Ministry). The court added that this investigation should be independent of the Procuraduría General de la República (PGR, Office of the Attorney General) and must follow the lines of investigations that the legal representatives of the victims dictate. See http://www.cjf.gob.mx/documentos/notasInformativas/docsNotasInformativas/2018/notaInformativa19.pdf. However, the PGR responded to the court the same day, indicating that the government did not share the magistrates’ view. The PGR believes that the court's resolution ignores the separation of powers guaranteed in the Mexican constitution. See Procuraduría General de la República, “Comunicado 606/18.”

2. In this context, it is important to note that, as the GIEI explained and demonstrated with evidence, the seizure, commandeering, or “taking” of vehicles by students has been a frequent practice in teachers’ colleges all around Mexico. Previously, in Guerrero, the taking of buses had always occurred without violent incidents, reprisals, or legal sanctions. Some bus drivers were interviewed by the GIEI and affirmed that, normally, when Ayotzinapa
students took their buses, they were still paid their full salary by the bus company and were also asked to stay with the bus to protect it from possible damages. See Interdisciplinary Group, Ayotzinapa Report, 19–20 (available in Spanish only, translated by Mariana Hernández Urías).

3. The GIEI includes Alejandro Valencia, a Colombian attorney; Ángela Buitrago, a Colombian public prosecutor; Claudia Paz, a Guatemalan judge; Carlos Beristain, a Spanish medical doctor; and Francisco Cox, a Chilean attorney.

4. The GIEI found irregularities, contradictions, and serious omissions in the PGR’s official reconstruction of the facts surrounding the existence of this bus (referred to as the fifth bus in the GIEI report). According to the GIEI’s analysis, the Mexican government should correct these deficiencies and open a new investigation since the students could have unknowingly taken a bus in which the cartel called “Guerreros Unidos” were transporting heroin or profits from the sale of drugs to Chicago. The GIEI believes that this omission in the official investigation could be related to the modus operandi and motivation for the aggression against the students. See Interdisciplinary Group, Ayotzinapa Report, 322–25.

5. Flores Velázquez was on the run for two years and was finally arrested in October 2016.

6. In Guerrero, as in other Mexican states, a federal command and information-gathering system, known as the C-4, gathers communications between federal, state, and municipal police forces. In this case, the GIEI experts established that post operations continued throughout the night of September 26. However, the C-4 was cut off “at certain times,” specifically during the arrests of the students who would later disappear. The Interdisciplinary Group’s report states that they “do not have access to information from C-4 at certain times because the communication is cut by Sedena,” the Secretary of National Defense. See Interdisciplinary Group, Ayotzinapa Report, 12.

7. www.youtube.com/watch?v=QNcfdHUiP8c.

8. This fact was called into question by the GIEI investigations. This team found a video that shows that Tomás Zerón, then head of the Criminal Investigation Agency of the PGR, together with other officials, visited the San Juan River days after the alleged events. Surprisingly, this was not included in the PGR’s official report. Relatives of the 43 believe that Zerón and his team may have planted the remains that were found there. Zerón was subsequently removed from office.


11. www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZkJOZWt8PA.

12. www.youtube.com/watch?v=QNcfdHUiP8c.

13. Evans, “Remembering the 43.”

14. See note 2 above.


16. My hypothesis is that the 43 were perceived by the police as more vulnerable than other nonconformists and dissidents critical of the government in Mexico. I have in mind, for example, the student movement of 2012, Yo Soy 132 (“I Am 132”). This movement was mainly made up of students from the Universidad Iberoamericana, conveniently located in Santa Fe, one of the richest districts in Mexico City. The majority of these students fit the profile of race and class privilege in Mexico. The protests organized by Yo Soy 132 gained immediate media attention, and after their verbal attacks on Enrique Peña Nieto (by then
candidate for the presidency for the Partido Revolucionario Institucional [PRI] and then
president of Mexico from 2012 to 2018), they did not suffer any physical aggression or
retaliation.

27. Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 9. This is the principle of constancy.
29. Freud, “Mourning and Melancholia.”
32. Freud, “Remembering,” 150.
33. In “Mourning and Melancholia,” Freud describes the melancholic as a patient who stages a
    dramatic scene to expose himself: “One might emphasize the presence in him of an almost
    opposite trait of insistent communicativeness which finds satisfaction in self-exposure”
    (247).
34. See Derrida, “Du mensonge en politique.”
36. Derrida understands being as text: “I found it necessary to recast the concept of text by
    generalizing it almost without limit… That is why there is nothing ‘beyond text.’ That is
    why South Africa, and apartheid are, like you and me, part of this general text, which is
    not to say that it can be read the way one reads a book. That is why the text is always a field
    of forces.” Derrida, “But, beyond,” 167–68. We could say that, for Derrida, all human rela-
    tions and exchanges are mediated by the economy of writing or, in other words, by con-
    textuality. From a deconstructive point of view, life can be thought of as a meta-text that we
    all inscribe and in which we are inscribed.
38. Derrida, “From a Restricted to General Economy,” 265.
46. See note 4.
48. The whole investigation by the GIEI team indicates that this bus might have been trafficking
49. Evans, “Remembering the 43.”

50. After the hideous events of September 26 and 27, 2014, in Iguala, locals from the state of Guerrero finally began reporting their missing relatives to state authorities. However, in some of their testimonies, the families stated that they suspected organized crime had taken away their loved ones but that they had been afraid of reporting this to the authorities out of fear of reprisal. Moreover, there was a widespread perception of collusion between police and criminal organizations. During the investigation of the forty-three missing students, numerous mass graves in Guerrero were found. As a result, locals began looking for buried corpses that could potentially belong to missing relatives. In this process, hundreds of unidentified bodies were discovered. These events shed light on the terrible political situation in Guerrero and the historical neglect of the federal government toward this state’s population, which has systematically been the victim of serious human rights violations.

51. See Illades, “La noche más triste.”


53. Evans, “Remembering the 43.”

54. See earlier discussion and note 44.

55. Interdisciplinary Group, Ayotzinapa Report, 258 (my emphasis).


60. Interdisciplinary Group, Ayotzinapa Report, 243.

61. Jerusalemite Women’s Coalition.


64. Evans, “Remembering the 43.”


68. Freud, Studies on Hysteria, 30.

69. Freud, Studies on Hysteria, 30.

70. In Spanish, the word duelo can be used to mean both “duel” and “mourning”; hence, this wordplay is not translatable into English.

71. In Spanish, “duelistas,” which means both mourners and duelists.


73. Derrida writes in “Archive Fever”: “In an enigmatic sense which will clarify itself perhaps (perhaps, because nothing should be sure here, for essential reasons), the question of the archive is not, we repeat, a question of the past. This is not the question of the concept dealing with the past which might already be at our disposal or not at our disposal, an archivable concept of the archive. It is a question of the future, the question of the future itself, the question of a response, of a promise and of responsibility for tomorrow. The archive: if we want to know what this will have meant, we will only know in the times to come” (27).

74. Derrida, Chaque fois unique, 9 (my translation).

75. Butler, “Vulnerability and Resistance Revisited.”
Works Cited


